

**The Use of Slave Terms in Deference and in Relation to God  
in  
The Hebrew Bible**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyses the metaphoric use of עֶבֶד ('slave, servant') and the female equivalents אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה when used in deferential speech in the Hebrew Bible, both in biblical narrative and in prayer. The focus is on the *intention* of the deferential use of these terms, a matter little studied. Such deferential use of is found to be part of identity construction, in which the speaker who is normally a social inferior to the hearer but is sometimes an equal or even socially superior, recognises that the hearer has power over him or her, particularly in the matter of granting a request. In all cases (including in prayer), such deference is one of a number of strategies of argumentation and/or other polite speaking, to assist the speaker get what they want. When aspects of slavery are evoked, this further heightens the argument the speaker presents. In most cases, the speaker achieves what is wanted from the interaction (indicated in narrative texts). The use of עֶבֶד as a title or to designate people such as officials and courtiers of the king, and prophets to God, is also discussed, to assist in the dissertation's argument that when the metaphoricity of slave terms is played upon, it evokes aspects of the practice of slavery, not the royal court, despite the frequent use of עֶבֶד and its ancient Near Eastern equivalents to denote officials.

Other ancient Near Eastern literature, mostly documentary and epigraphic, is referred to and sometimes analysed. Such literature indicates that master-slave deference was a long-standing phenomenon in the ancient Near East, and that such use of slave terms was 'lexicalised', that is, metaphoric associations with slavery is not normally evoked. This is found to be the case in the Hebrew Bible, though at times the metaphoricity is evoked and played upon.

## **DECLARATION**

I, Edward John Bridge, certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. I further certify that all literature and other sources of information used in this thesis have been appropriately acknowledged.

Signed:

Date:



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I also wish to thank Macquarie University who, on behalf of the Federal Government of Australia, granted me an Australian Postgraduate Award for 2009-2010. This allowed me to move from part-time study to full-time study, and thus complete my project quicker than anticipated.

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Edward J. Bridge

## ABBREVIATIONS

### **BIBLICAL BOOKS**

#### **Hebrew Bible / Old Testament (in order as in Christian Bibles)**

|              |       |                 |        |           |      |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|--------|-----------|------|
| Genesis      | Gen   | 2 Chronicles    | 2 Chr  | Daniel    | Dan  |
| Exodus       | Ex    | Ezra            | Ezra   | Hosea     | Hos  |
| Leviticus    | Lev   | Nehemiah        | Neh    | Joel      | Joel |
| Numbers      | Num   | Esther          | Esth   | Amos      | Amos |
| Deuteronomy  | Dt    | Job             | Job    | Obadiah   | Ob   |
| Joshua       | Josh  | Psalms          | Ps/Pss | Jonah     | Jon  |
| Judges       | Judg  | Proverbs        | Prov   | Micah     | Mic  |
| Ruth         | Ruth  | Ecclesiastes    | Eccl   | Nahum     | Nah  |
| 1 Samuel     | 1 Sam | Song of Solomon | Songs  | Habakkuk  | Hab  |
| 2 Samuel     | 2 Sam | Isaiah          | Isa    | Zephaniah | Zeph |
| 1 Kings      | 1 Kgs | Jeremiah        | Jer    | Haggai    | Hag  |
| 2 Kings      | 2 Kgs | Lamentations    | Lam    | Zechariah | Zech |
| 1 Chronicles | 1 Chr | Ezekiel         | Ezek   | Malachi   | Mal  |

#### **New Testament (those referred to, in biblical order)**

|             |      |         |       |            |     |
|-------------|------|---------|-------|------------|-----|
| Mark        | Mk   | Hebrews | Heb   | Revelation | Rev |
| Romans      | Rom  | James   | Jms   |            |     |
| Philippians | Phil | 2 Peter | 2 Pet |            |     |

### **OTHER**

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| AB         | Anchor Bible  |
| ABR        | <i>Australian Biblical Review</i>                               |
| ANET       | <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> |
| AnOr       | Analectica Orientalia   |
| AoF        | <i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>                             |
| ASALE Supp | Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte    |
| BASOR      | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>    |
| BCOTWP     | Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms        |
| BI         | <i>Biblical Interpretation</i>                                  |
| BJS        | Brown Judaic Studies  |
| BLS        | Bible and Literature Series                                     |
| BTB        | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>                               |
| BZAW       | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| CALS       | Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series                            |
| CB         | Century Bible   |
| CBC        | Cambridge Biblical Commentary                                   |
| CBET       | Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology                 |

## Introduction

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>CBQ</i>     | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>   |
| CBQMS          | Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series                               |
| <i>CE</i>      | <i>Critical Enquiry</i>  |
| <i>DOTP</i>    | <i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch</i>                         |
| EBS            | Encountering Biblical Studies  |
| ECC            | Eerdmans Critical Commentary   |
| <i>EI</i>      | <i>Eretz-Israel</i>  |
| <i>EDNT</i>    | <i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i>                          |
| FAT            | Forschungen zum Alten Testament  |
| HBM            | Hebrew Bible Monographs  |
| <i>HS</i>      | <i>Hebrew Studies</i>  |
| ICC            | International Critical Commentary  |
| <i>IEJ</i>     | <i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>  |
| <i>JANES</i>   | <i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>                         |
| <i>JBL</i>     | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>                                      |
| <i>JNES</i>    | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>                                     |
| <i>JHS</i>     | <i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>   |
| <i>JJS</i>     | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>   |
| <i>JRS</i>     | <i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>  |
| JSNTSS         | Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary Series            |
| <i>JSOT</i>    | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>                          |
| JSOTSS         | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplementary Series            |
| <i>JT</i>      | <i>Journal of Translation</i>  |
| <i>JTS</i>     | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>                                      |
| LBI            | Library of Biblical Interpretation   |
| LCS            | LEA's Communication Series   |
| LHB            | Library of Hebrew Bible  |
| LXX            | Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible                                      |
| <i>MLR</i>     | <i>The Modern Language Review</i>  |
| <i>MS</i>      | <i>Metaphor and Symbol</i>   |
| MT             | Masoretic Text (Hebrew Bible; <i>Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> )     |
| NAC            | New American Commentary  |
| NASB           | New American Standard Version  |
| NCB            | New Century Bible Commentary   |
| NCBC           | New Cambridge Biblical Commentary  |
| NIBC           | New International Biblical Commentary                                      |
| NICOT          | New International Commentary on the Old Testament                          |
| <i>NIDOTTE</i> | <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> |

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <i>NIDNT</i> | <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>  |
| NIV          | New International Version                                      |
| NIVAC        | NIV Application Commentary                                     |
| NRSV         | New Revised Standard Version                                   |
| NSBT         | New Studies in Biblical Theology                               |
| OTL          | Old Testament Library  |
| OTS          | Old Testament Studies  |
| OtSt         | Oudtestamentische Studiën                                      |
| <i>PEQ</i>   | <i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>                         |
| <i>RB</i>    | <i>Revue Biblique</i>  |
| <i>RUO</i>   | <i>Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa</i>                          |
| SBL SBL      | Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature  |
| SBLDS        | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series             |
| SBLSS        | Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series                |
| SBLWAW       | Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World |
| SBT          | Studies in Biblical Theology                                   |
| <i>SE</i>    | <i>Sociology of Education</i>                                  |
| <i>SF</i>    | <i>Social Forces</i>   |
| SIS          | Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics                      |
| <i>SJOT</i>  | <i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>               |
| SOTSMS       | Society for Old Testament Study Monographs                     |
| SPOT         | Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament                  |
| <i>SPQ</i>   | <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i>                             |
| SSCFL        | Studies in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Language     |
| SSN          | Studia Semitica Neerlandica                                    |
| <i>ST</i>    | <i>Sociological Theory</i>                                     |
| <i>StudT</i> | <i>Studia Theologica</i>                                       |
| SVT          | Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>                        |
| <i>TB</i>    | <i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>  |
| <i>TDNT</i>  | <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>             |
| <i>TDOT</i>  | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>             |
| TOTC         | Tyndale Old Testament Commentary                               |
| <i>TWOT</i>  | <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>               |
| <i>UF</i>    | <i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>                                      |
| WBC          | Word Biblical Commentary                                       |
| WEC          | Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary                                 |
| <i>VT</i>    | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>                                       |
| <i>ZA</i>    | <i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>                           |
| <i>ZAW</i>   | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>      |

In accordance with Macquarie University policy, those parts of my dissertation that have been published (Chapter 8.2.1), accepted for publication (Chapters 5.2, 5.3) or submitted for publication (Chapter 3.2), remain in the formats required by the respective journals. That is, footnoting and bibliographic references in these sections of the dissertation vary from what is the usual style, which is a modified Chicago humanities system.

For each chapter (except when the above applies), I have also given full bibliographic details for the first reference to a work, to assist the reader in remembering that work in later references in the chapter. This helps avoid the need to constantly refer to the bibliography.

Where English translations are not my own, I have used the *New Revised Standard Version*. Translations of other ancient texts are those of the scholarship cited, except for the Lachish letters, which are my own. The Hebrew text used is that of the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. WHY STUDY THE USE OF SLAVE TERMS?<sup>1</sup>

I want to ask the question, why are slave terms used outside of the context of slavery in relation to both humans and God in the Hebrew Bible? Specifically, I wish to ask the question, why are famous figures such as Abraham, Moses and David, along with the prophets, called עֶבֶד of God? Why does a person use עֶבֶד ('your servant/slave') in deference to others and to God? What does this portray about people and worshippers in the Hebrew Bible?

The topic is worth studying for a number of reasons. One is that some influential studies have tended to tie the metaphorical use of עֶבֶד with the court.<sup>2</sup> That is, metaphorical use is automatically seen as derived from the court. This is too limiting and does not take into account all contexts of the uses of the term.

A second reason is that most studies of slave terms have been done at a philological level.<sup>3</sup> Consequently the *function* of metaphorical uses of slave terms is overlooked. The use of linguistic and metaphor theory and relevant methods of interpretation within the field of literary criticism can draw out this needed aspect of study. The results will assist other studies into ancient Israelite self-conception and their view of the world around them.

A third reason has been a change in historians' views about slavery, which necessitates the revisiting of the interpretation of master-slave deferential language. Up until recently, the

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in Section 1.1, especially my second, third and fourth reasons, was presented at the NewMac Humanities Postgrad Symposium, Newcastle University, Callaghan Campus, 23 Feb 2008, and subsequently published as Edward J. Bridge, 'Enslaved to an Artifice: a Study into the Truth behind the Title of Deference, "Slave/Servant", as used in the Ancient Near East before the Time of Alexander The Great', *Humanity* 2 (2008) 1-3 (<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Schools/Humanities%20and%20Social%20Science/Humanity/Bridge.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Curt Lindhagen, *The Servant Motif in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Lundquistska Bokhandeln, 1950); W. Zimmerli, J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (SBT; trans. H. Knight, J. Jeremias and others; London, 1965) 11-36.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. J.P.M. van der Ploeg, 'Slavery in the Old Testament', in *Congress Volume, Uppsala, 1971* (SVT 22; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 72-87; H. Ringgren, H. Simian-Yofre, U. Rüterwörden, 'עֶבֶד *ābad*; עֶבֶד *ēbed*; עֶבְדָּה *ābōdā*', in *TDOT* (eds, G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry; trans. D.W. Stott; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: 1992 [1986], Vol. 10) 383-387, 390-398.

Greco-Roman practice of slavery was explained away<sup>4</sup> or presented in positive terms.<sup>5</sup> The latter is done in recognition of the uniquely Roman system of freedmen and freedwomen being sometimes being granted Roman citizenship, and the presence of what is termed 'managerial slaves' along with the imperial slaves from Augustus' time onwards (*familia Caesaris*); that is, slaves who had significant responsibility because of their closeness to their master's power and status.<sup>6</sup> These features of Roman slavery are appealed to when biblical scholars discuss the New Testament's use of slavery terms, and especially Paul's comments on slavery in 1 Corinthians 11.<sup>7</sup> That is, the positive use of slave terms as a title is seen to have parallels in Roman society. By default, one could imagine the same for the Hebrew Bible. Since the publication of Orlando Patterson's monograph, *Slavery and Social Death*, in 1982,<sup>8</sup> there have been an increasing number of historians and biblical scholars who now view the institution of slavery, whether Greco-Roman, ancient Near Eastern or biblical, as cruel.<sup>9</sup> Patterson focussed on the idea that slavery meant the loss of social identity, a view that had been mooted earlier, though not always at the forefront of scholarship.<sup>10</sup> This is not

<sup>4</sup> So R.A. Horsley, 'The Slave Systems of Classical Antiquity and their Reluctant Recognition by Modern Scholars', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998) 19-21.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. J. Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man* (trans., T. Wiedemann; Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1974); Westermann, W.L., 'Athenaeus and the Slaves of Athens', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology Supp. Vol.* (1941) 470, and 'Slavery and the Elements of Freedom in Ancient Greece', *Quarterly Bulletin of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America* (Jan 1943) 9-10, 16.

<sup>6</sup> T.E.J. Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery: A Source Book* (London, Baltimore: Routledge, John Hopkins University Press, 1981) 161-164, 166 cites four texts, that indicate some of the privileges of the imperial slaves: Claudius' Senate Recommendation in *Code of Theodosius* 4,12; Pliny the Elder *Natural History* 12,5; Statius Silvae 3,3; and Tacitus *Annals* 12. Pliny (*Natural History* 12,5) and Tacitus (*Annals* 12) show awareness of some people taking advantage of the status and privilege so offered.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. C. Osiek, D.L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (The Family, Religion and Culture; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 81, citing Livy, 41.9.11; C. Osiek, 'Slavery in the Second Testament World', *BTB* 22 (1992) 176; S.S. Bartchy, *Mallon Chrēsai: First-century Slavery and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:21* (SBLDS 11; Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973); idem, 'Slavery (Greco-Roman)', in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols; eds, D.N. Freedman, et al; New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1992, vol. 6) 65-73, 66, 70; Martin, D.B., *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990)

<sup>8</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982)

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g. P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 1-19; Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 9-10, 120; Horsley, 'Slave Systems,' 19-66; A.D. Callahan, R.A. Horsley, A. Smith, 'Introduction: The slavery of New Testament Studies', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998) 1-15; Stephen R. Llewelyn, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity, Volume 6* (Macquarie University: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1992) 48-52; Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (NSBT; Leicester: Apollos, 1999) 43. M.I. Finley, 'Was Greek Civilisation based on Slave Labour?' *Historica* 8 (1959) 145-164, is an early advocate of this view, and was used by Patterson.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. W.F. Albright, 'The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preëxilic History of Judah, with Some Observations on Ezekiel', *JBL* 51 (1932) 80, fn.7: 'The man who entered the royal service ceased to be attached to the clan organisation, and became a "slave" of the king in a legal sense', following Alt, *Die Staatenbildung der Israeliten in Palästina* (Leipzig: Universität Leipzig, 1930) 48. Albright (and Alt) deals with the social location of officials in royal service, but the idea of slavery as natal alienation, Orlando's thesis, is there in principle: Officials derive their identity from their service to the king, rather than from their clan. This idea has



always accepted by later scholars,<sup>11</sup> but Patterson's work has had the effect of stimulating scholarship to deconstruct ancient texts about slaves, which are written by elites, and look for evidence within those texts or elsewhere to try and find/reconstruct the slaves' views about their situation.<sup>12</sup> Patterson's work has also had the effect of bringing to prominence that Greco-Romans despised slaves and being in servitude, reflected in such texts as Texts that portray the Greco-Roman attitude are Xenophon *Mem II*: viii.1-5 (a free man refuses to accept employment by another); Aristotle *Politics* 1253b-1254b; 1260a; 1280a; *Nic Eth* 1161a-b (slaves are deficient mentally, or are animals, or tools) and the frequent parody of slaves as fools in mimes such as Catullus' *Laureolus*, popular in the first and second century Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup> I have mentioned the Greco-Roman practice of slavery since it is the slave system of antiquity that is most studied, with other slavery systems inevitably being compared to it. My study recognises that slavery in ancient Israel and the wider ancient Near East is cruel, but the fact that slave terms were used in positive contexts requires study as to how it could happen despite the inherent cruelty of the system.

A fourth reason is related to the third reason. Even as scholars sought to explain away or emphasise the positive aspects of the Greco-Roman practice of slavery, there has been a tendency to describe other ancient societies as people enslaved to their rulers. For example, in 1959, Finley stated that:

‘The pre-Greek world – the world of the Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Assyrians; and I cannot refrain from adding the Mycenaeans – was, in a very profound sense, a world without free men, in the sense which the West has come to understand that concept.’<sup>14</sup>

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been discussed recently by Carolyn S. Leeb, ‘Polygyny - Insights from Rural Haiti’, in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed., P.F. Esler; London: SCM, 2005) 50-65. See p.61: ‘Certainly, serving at court meant becoming part of the king's household ....’

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g. Sean Stilwell, ‘Power, Honour and Shame: The Ideology of Royal Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate’, *Africa* 70 (2000) 394-421, who, accepting many of Orlando's arguments, argues that slaves of royalty in African Muslim societies had honour and status by virtue of their closeness to power, even if technically they were without status and honour. That is, they were in a similar situation to the slaves in the *familia Caesaris* of Rome.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g. Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 11-13 and texts §§209-234.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g. Wiedemann, *Slavery*, 1-5, 13, and Garnsey, *Ideas*, 11-14. See also Keith Bradley, ‘Animalizing the Slave: The Truth of Fiction’, *JRS* 90 (2000) 110-125; and L.L. Welborn, *Paul the Fool: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1-4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (Early Christianity in Context; JSNTSS 293; London: T&T Clark, 2005) 99-101. However, as Welborn notes (pp.7, 101), mimes were primarily aimed at the lower classes (though also watched by the upper classes), with their themes and bawdy humour giving light relief to their situation. The popularity of mimes suggests that the lower classes, including slaves, did not object to their portrayal as fools (c.f. Welborn, p.4: in mime, ‘spectators of all classes recognized themselves and their contemporaries’).

<sup>14</sup> Finley, ‘Greek Civilisation,’ 164.

This no doubt is a result of a literal interpretation of the common use of master-slave language for deference in ancient Near Eastern societies, (see, e.g. Chapter 5.3).<sup>15</sup> Theological dictionaries tend to reflect this attitude in their listings of slave terms when they discuss the non-literal meanings. Where does the view come from? Does it come from an over zealous application of Greco-Roman texts that described peoples outside of Athens and Rome as slaves to despotic rulers, as stated in Plato, *Laws* 3.693a and *Republic* 5.469c, and also by Tacitus, *Annals* 12.11? Or is it a reflection of an older European superiority complex when discussing other cultures?<sup>16</sup> Despite the argument of Albright in the 1930s and Dandamayev in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, that deferential use of slave terms, especially on seals, should not be interpreted as referring to chattel slavery,<sup>17</sup> and scholarship's general acceptance of this, occasionally a literal interpretation of slave terms used in deference still appears in publications. For example, Edelman interprets Abigail's self-abasement to David in 1 Sam 25:41 as offering herself to be a concubine or mistress (in effect, a slave-wife) to David.<sup>18</sup>

A fifth reason, related to the fourth reason, is the issue of how slavery terms have been translated over time. Harris, in a discussion on the translation of δοῦλος in the New Testament, notes how the Authorized Version uses 'servant' in most cases, picking up an anglicized Latin word for slave, *servus*, possibly to avoid connotations associated with slavery. Its effect was to hide occurrences of slavery in the NT (and the Hebrew Bible), which has been found useful because of present day western scholarship's embarrassment over the practice of slavery in their cultures, particularly that in Antebellum United States of America. Because of the American experience of slavery, using 'servant' instead of 'slave' avoids

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Garnsey, *Ideas*, 238; Marcus Barth, Helmut Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 68-69; C.H. Haas, 'Slave, Slavery', in *DOTP* (eds, T.D. Alexander, D.W. Baker; Leicester: IVP, 2003) 778-779; and Torczyner's translations of עבֹדֵךְ and אֲדֹנִי in the Lachish ostraca as 'slave' and 'master': Harry Torczyner, *Lachish I (Tell ed Duweir): The Lachish Letters* (London, 1938); Garnsey and Finley's comments are no doubt influenced by the portrayal of slaves by Greco-Roman elites: see R. Schlaifer, 'Greek theories of slavery from Homer to Aristotle', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 47 (1936) 167-168.

<sup>16</sup> C.f. Knox, Robert, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon* (1681), reprinted in *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 6:1-4 (1956-1957), who, after noting how Ceylonese people in the seventeenth century used 'dog' as a form of self-abasement or deference to their king, goes on to say, 'By which by the way, we may conjecture at the height of the King and the slavery of the People under him.' The quotation is cited in D.W. Thomas, 'Kelebh "Dog": Its Origin and Some Usages of it in the Old Testament', *VT* 10 (1960) 410-427.

<sup>17</sup> Albright, 'Seal of Eliakim,' 80. C.f. Nahman Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-exilic Judean Archive* (Qedem 4; Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976) 11-12, 30-31, for אֲדֹנִי; Muhammad A. Dandamayev, 'Slavery - Ancient Near East and Old Testament', in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols; eds, D.N. Freedman, et al; New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1992, vol. 6) 62.

<sup>18</sup> Diana V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOTSS 121; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 214. See Chapter 6.2.2.6 for critique.

projecting recent understandings of slavery into the biblical periods. However, Harris argues that more occurrences of δοῦλος in the New Testament should be translated as ‘slave’ and cites others who think the same.<sup>19</sup> The NRSV shows something of the dilemma for the Hebrew Bible. It translates Ziba’s twenty עבדים in 2 Sam 9:10 as ‘servants’ but translates two of Shimei’s עבדים who ran away (1 Kgs 2:39-40) as ‘slaves’ (see Chapter 4.2.5.1). There is a similar issue with the female equivalent term אמה. It is frequently translated as ‘maid’ or ‘maidservant’, which has connotations of a maid-in-waiting. This results in considerable discussion over the term’s meaning on the Shelimoth seal ( . לשלמית אמת אלנתן פה. *Belonging to Shelimoth maidservant of Elnathan [the governor]*) and the Royal Steward’s tomb inscription at Siloam ( יהו אשר על הבית אין פה כסף וזהב [כי] אם [עצמתו] ועצמת אמתה ) זאת [קברת ...] *This is [the sepulchre of ...]yahu who is over the house. There is no silver and no gold here but [his bones] and the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who will open this!*). Avigad, for example, has to engage in a long discussion to argue that אמה on the seal might refer to a female official, yet in earlier articles argued that אמה in the tomb inscription and in two Ammonite seals means ‘slave-wife’.<sup>20</sup> It would be better if scholarship and translators translated אמה (and its synonym שפחה<sup>21</sup>) as ‘slave woman’ or ‘female servant’ rather than ‘maid’ or ‘maid-servant’, which would make the need for justification of non-literal meanings less lengthy.

A further reason, though not a primary reason, is that my study can provide material that can be used in the study of the use of slave terms in the New Testament. Generally, it is argued that New Testament’s use of slave language is influenced by the Hebrew Bible’s use of slave language, mediated through Greek translation. This is argued for δοῦλος/οι Χριστοῦ (*servant/s slave(s) of Christ*; Rom 1:1; Gal 1:1 Phil 1:1; Jms 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; c.f. Rev 22:3, 6); Jesus’ statements that those of his disciples who wish to be first are to be the slave of all (Gk) (Mk 10:44 and parallels) and he *came not to be served but to serve* (Mk 10:45 and parallels). This argument is made based on the argument that because Greco-Romans did not view slaves and

<sup>19</sup> Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 183-191.

<sup>20</sup> Avigad, *Bullae and Seals*, 12, 30-31; N. Avigad, ‘A Seal of a Slave-wife (amah)’, *PEQ* (1946) 125-132; idem, ‘The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village’, *IEJ* 3 (1953) 137-152. But see Édouard Lipiński, ‘Kinship Terminology in 1 Sam 25.40-42’, *ZA* 7 (1994) 12-16, who argues that אמה in these inscriptions means ‘wife’—a free wife.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 1.1 for discussion on אמה and שפחה.

servitude in a positive light, service to deity is an Eastern Mediterranean religious concept.<sup>22</sup> My study can help better nuance such arguments.

Clearly, there is considerable difficulty when it comes to discussing slave terms in the Hebrew Bible, let alone their use in deferential language and in relation to God. The history of scholarship affects discussion. Present day perceptions on slavery can be projected on the practice of slavery in antiquity. Certainly present day perceptions on slavery have affected translation of slave terms in the Bible. The increasing awareness of slavery as a cruel institution is welcome, but it makes more difficult the terms' use in positive contexts, similar to when scholars contrast the New Testament's use of slave terms with Greco-Roman sentiments about slaves. Despite this increasing awareness of slavery as a cruel institution, past ways of understanding the terms still continue in present scholarship.

## 1.2. RATIONALE

It is my hope that I can avoid the difficulties listed above by analysing the use of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible in their contexts, without defending the practice of slavery and not attempting to see positives in the system. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, it will be found that chattel slavery was practiced, in contrast to Greco-Roman slavery, only on a small scale in the ancient Near East, though many people across the region in all time periods were in situations that would be considered close to slavery by Western scholarship. This does not excuse the institution nor make it more humane than the Greco-Roman practice of slavery, evidenced by indications of slaves running away in texts that deal with or mention slavery. As I tease out the metaphoricity of the slave terms in the Hebrew Bible, I will consider both positives (e.g. for status) and negatives (e.g. subject to God's demands; awareness of social inequality) in their use.

This thesis studies how slavery terms and imagery are used metaphorically in the Hebrew Bible for deference and for people in relation to God. I argue that master-slave deference is

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<sup>22</sup> See, e.g. Alfons Weiser, 'δουλεύω, κτλ', in *EDNT* (3 vols; eds, H. Balz, G. Schneider; trans., J.W. Thompson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, vol. 1) 350; Rudolph Tunkte, 'Slavery', in *NIDNTT* (4 vols; ed., C. Brown; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1986, vol. 3) 593-395; Barth and Blanke, *Philemon*, 67-69; Vogt, *Ancient Slavery*, 143. Contrary is M.J. Brown, 'Paul's use of *Doulos Christos Ihsou* in Romans 1:1', *JBL* 124 (2001) 723-737, who argues that Paul's use of slave terms is in keeping with the Greco-Roman use of terms in the first century. Tunkte, 'Slavery,' 593, also cites texts in which the δοῦλος word group is used for serving the gods.

part of a range of polite language strategies that assist the speaker to obtain what it is they wish for from their communication with the hearer, who is normally a social superior. When social standing is not a factor between interactants, then master-slave deference becomes a strategy of identity construction. In nearly all cases, speakers get what they want, thus it can be said that the one who takes the role of a 'slave' in communication is the 'master' of the interaction. In relation to God, both in deference in prayer, and in designations of certain people (e.g. leaders, prophets), slave terms carry a sense of status, but it is derived from God's power and authority. The way master-slave deference is used in prayer changes from that used between people, indicating a sense of intimacy with God that is not present when master-slave deference is used between people. This, despite the presence and permission of chattel slavery and other forms of non-free labour in the Hebrew Bible, being a עַבֵּד of God (YHWH) was not a negative idea. The same is the case for people in the service of the king. Rather, both reflect the typical ancient Near Eastern view that everyone was in 'subjection' to someone else, whether a slave, a free person, a leader, or a king. To assist my argument, I also discuss briefly the biblical portrayal and ancient Near Eastern practice of slavery, and assume that how people in the Bible spoke to one another affected how they portrayed themselves and others in relation to God. I also assume that language use in the Hebrew Bible reflects common language practice of the time. This assumption is given validity by analysing the language used by the senders of the Lachish letters.

This thesis is essentially socio-historical. That is, it studies the biblical texts in their historical and social setting as much as this can be done. However, determining what historical and social setting the Hebrew Bible reflects is problematic for a number of reasons.

- Scholarship generally assumes a period of oral transmission for most books, especially the Pentateuch, before they were written. The same can be assumed for most prophetic books. That is, by the time a book is committed to writing, aspects of society may have changed. For slavery, it is generally assumed that the legislation in Exodus 21 was compiled first, then the legislations of Lev 25 and Deut 15. It is argued that both Lev 25 and Deut 15 reflect developments in Israelite society (see Chapter 3).
- The historical books, Josh-2 Kgs ('the Deuteronomistic History') and 1-2 Chr claim to be dependent on other source material, such as court histories (e.g. *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel*, *The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah*, *The*

*Book of the Acts of Solomon* [1 Kgs 11:41]) and writings such as *The Book of Jashar* (2 Sam 1:18); *the records of the seer Samuel, and ... of the prophet Nathan, and ... of the seer Gad* (1 Chr 29:29); and *the records of the seers* (2 Chr 33:19). Even if it could be proven that what is presented was the result of minimal editing, the books cover more than 500 years of history, which no doubt saw changes in society, due to external pressures and exile.

- The mix of source material and editing creates endless discussion as to what in a given text reflects the source material and what reflects the final redactor's ideas. For example, the use of עֶבֶד for prophets in 1-2 Kgs and in Jer and Ezek is considered to be a Deuteronomistic or later editor's term (discussed in Chapter 9.2.3). That is, practices and thinking at the time of compilation may be retrojected into past history, even as some antiquated practices are retained in the narrative.
- The Hebrew Bible is a collection of essentially literary texts; that is, works that were not written in the context of everyday life. That is, events and characters' behaviour are written/narrated to fulfil the wider purpose of the narrative, including theological and ideological purposes, and may not reflect exactly how people spoke and behaved at the time of writing. This can include master-slave language in deference and in self-abasement.
- Being literary texts, the biblical books may reflect the social setting of elites who could read and write in contrast to the majority of people. This can be argued for the prophetic books, even if the prophets they are named after were 'ordinary' people, such as Amos claims (Amos 7:14-15).<sup>23</sup> That is, master-slave deference in the Hebrew Bible and the use of עֶבֶד for prophets may reflect elitist views. Mitigating this, and the possibility that the biblical texts may reflect normal speaking and behaviour, is the high use of master-slave deference in the Lachish letters and the *Mešad Ḥashavyahu* plea (see Chapter 5.3). In both, a high use of master-slave deference is used by people who could be considered 'ordinary: in the letters, low ranking officials; and in the plea, an ordinary person who addresses an official.

It can be assumed that most books in the Hebrew Bible were put into their present form at the latest in the Persian period. This includes the Pentateuch as Ezra and Nehemiah witness to a

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<sup>23</sup> However, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are members of priestly families (Jer 1:1; Ezek 1:3), and Zephaniah is a member of the royal family (Zeph 1:1).

law code being used in the mid to late fourth century BCE.<sup>24</sup> Jeremiah is an exception, with the Masoretic, LXX and Dead Sea scrolls witnessing to considerable variation in the text. The book of Daniel is commonly thought to have been written in the Hellenistic period. Assuming a Persian period compilation for most biblical books allows for simplification of the issues just mentioned: the society that is reflected in biblical texts is that of Israel in the Persian period, especially if it is assumed that the biblical books were considerably edited. Even if sources were only minimally edited, it can still be assumed that slavery and the use of slave terms were understood as being the same as in the Persian period, under the assumption that ancient peoples did not have historical awareness of changes in the practice of slavery over time. Acceptance of arguments using archaeology<sup>25</sup> and literary theory<sup>26</sup> that the historical narratives were *composed* late (i.e. the late monarchic period at the earliest, and more commonly assumed in the Persian period) also add to the case of a Persian period portrayal. However, despite the issues involved, many scholars still accept that the historical narratives (with the exception of the Pentateuch and Joshua) and the prophetic books contain material that reflect an earlier period and its practices, so the Biblical texts may witness to changes in the practice of slavery. Against this, however, is Mendelsohn's conclusion after his extensive discussion of slavery in Mesopotamia: slave systems remained fairly constant over the periods and cultures he surveys. He explains this on the basis of the economic pattern of those societies:

The 'economic foundation' of the various societies '– private ownership of land, intensive agriculture, small-scale shop industry, and primitive techniques – remained and underwent almost no change at all'.<sup>27</sup>

However, he indicates at least one change: as time went on the number of manumission documents decreased remarkably.<sup>28</sup> Snell, in his discussions on the place of slavery, despite listing various aspects in different regions in different times, also implies that slavery in

<sup>24</sup> This does not automatically exclude arguments that certain books may have been compiled earlier. For example, Jer 26:17-19 indicates Micah's prophecies were remembered 100 years after being given. Were they preserved through oral or written transmission?

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Israel* (JSOTSS 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); William G. Dever, *Who were the Israelites, and Where did they come from?* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003); Israel Finkelstein, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* (New York, London: Free Press, 2001); Thomas L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers create a Past* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999); and Keith W. Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York: Routledge, 1996)

<sup>26</sup> E.g. many of the works cited in Chapter 6.2 that deal with 1 Sam 25 assume that 1 Sam 25 and most other parts of the narrative of David's rise to power was composed late.

<sup>27</sup> I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949) 121.

<sup>28</sup> Mendelsohn, *Slavery*, 83.

general did not change much over time.<sup>29</sup> Thus, no matter whether the biblical records reflect Persian period practice of slavery alone, or witnesses to the practice of slavery over a period of time, it can be assumed that it changed little over time. Chapter 3 includes discussion of the topic that biblical laws may reflect changes in practice. Even in the matter of master-slave deference, comparisons of ancient Near Eastern letters over all time periods show that the basic structure does not change.<sup>30</sup> There may be regional differences in effusiveness by the socially inferior sender to his/her recipient, along with prayer wishes and greetings,<sup>31</sup> but the general structure of letters is usually *my lord-your servant* in prescripts and mostly *my lord-I* in the bodies, along with a regular use of *my lord-your servant* in the bodies. This is discussed in more depth in Chapters 5 and 7 in conjunction with the use of deference in the Lachish letters and in Genesis.

In dealing with the problem that texts (especially narrative) may be fictitious compositions and/or reflect society at the time of compilation, I will analyse texts as they stand, then deal with historical and compositional matters as they relate to my study. Chapters 8.2.2-4 and 9.2.3 in particular have space devoted to these matters, since scholarship has argued that the use of ‘servant’ is connected with composition and editing. Most of my referencing to ancient Near Eastern sources for parallels in language use involves texts dated well before the biblical writings. This shows the antiquity of the metaphoric use of slave terms for both deference and in titles. Despite the easy availability of English translations of the massive numbers of Akkadian letters and other documents from the Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods, paralleling these with biblical texts has waned due to the continued interest in using Ugaritic

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<sup>29</sup> D.C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East 3100-332 B.C.E.* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997) 119. Raymond Westbrook, ‘Slave and Master in Ancient Near Eastern Law’, in *The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 1: The Shared Tradition* (eds. B. Wells; F.R. Magdalene; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 161-216 (repr. of ‘Slave and Master in Ancient Near Eastern Law’, *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70 (1995) 1631-1676) also assumes the same.

<sup>30</sup> Compare Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia* (SBLWAW 3; Atlanta, 1993) §§ 6, 24-25, 30, 75-79, 97 (Sumerian and early Akkadian letters; 2000 BCE and earlier), with the Aramaic Elephantine letters, Cowley 30, 37, 38 (410-420 BCE; texts in B. Porten [ed. and trans.], *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans on Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translations* [Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1976] 80-81, 83, 90). See also the monarchic period and later (including the Elephantine papyri) ancient Near Eastern letters cited in Bridge, ‘Enslaved,’ 5-7.

<sup>31</sup> Compare Egyptian letters (the most effusive) with Hittite letters (the least effusive). For texts, see Harry A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (SBLWAW 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); and Edward Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (SBLWAW 1; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990). Vassals to Egypt in the Amarna letters are also effusive (texts: William L. Moran [ed., trans.], *The Amarna Letters* [Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992]), though Ellen F. Morris, ‘Bowing and Scraping in the Ancient Near East: An Investigation into Obsequiousness in the Amarna Letters’, *JNES* 65 (2006) 179-195, notes there is regional variation in effusiveness, explaining it as a result of regional variation in relationship with Egypt.



material. Despite antedating the biblical period and writings by some centuries, Ugaritic materials are seen as better than Mesopotamian Akkadian materials for parallels due to the closeness of the Ugaritic language to biblical Hebrew, and the belief that what is presented in the texts (especially religious beliefs) is closest to ideas expressed in the Bible.<sup>32</sup> Despite being in Akkadian, the vassal correspondence in the Amarna letters, dating to the same time period as the Ugaritic texts, is also useful, being written by Canaanites who lived in the same area as the later Israelites. The use of both sets of materials presupposes that the ancient Israelites took over aspects of Canaanitic culture.

### 1.3. FOCUS OF STUDY

My study focuses on the main terms for slaves in the Hebrew Bible: עבד for men and אמה and שפחה for women. These terms are frequently, in fact mostly, used outside of slavery contexts. To עבד, אמה and שפחה can be added נער ('youth') and the feminine equivalent נערה ('young woman'), which frequently have the meaning 'servant',<sup>33</sup> and designate, for example, workers (Ruth 2:5, 15) and fighting men (2 Sam 2:14; Gen 14:24 [Abram's allies]). נער and נערה can also cover slaves (e.g. Ex 2:5). Lexica and theological dictionaries<sup>34</sup> along with specialist articles and papers<sup>35</sup> give a good indication of the wide range of meanings the terms can have. However, in the interests of covering the entire Hebrew Bible, frequently in a context of space restrictions, there are inadequacies. One is that some contexts, such as the use of עבד in deference to an equal, can be construed to be common when in fact it is rare. A second is that differences in usage can be overlooked. For example, נער and נערה are not used in master-

<sup>32</sup> Two scholars who in particular promote Ugaritic materials as parallels for biblical materials are Wyatt and Dahood. See, e.g. Nicolas Wyatt, *'There's such Divinity doth Hedge a King': Selected essays of Nicolas Wyatt on Royal Ideology in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* (SOTSMS; Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2005); and Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (3 Vols; AB 17a-c; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965, 1968, 1970).

<sup>33</sup> C.f. E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 32-33: נער and נערה refer to the servant class. Other languages do the same, eg. Greek παῖς and English 'boy' referring to servants and slaves.

<sup>34</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner et al, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (4 vols; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994-1999); David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993+); G.J. Botterwick and others (ed.), *TDOT* (Vols 1-15; trans, various; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1974-2006). Individual articles in *TDOT* are listed in Chapter 4.2, n.2. See also F. Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, W. Gesenius, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, 1979 [1907]), pp. 712-715; Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 11-36. C.f. W.C. Kaiser, 'עבד' (*abad*), work, serve', in *TWOT* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago, 1980) 639; and C.H. Haas, 'Slave, Slavery', in *DOTP* (eds, T.D. Alexander, D.W. Baker; Leicester: IVP, 2003) 779.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Revell, *Designation*, 30-36; Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 174; Lindhagen, *Servant Motif*; van der Ploeg, 'Slavery,' 72-87; A. Jepsen, 'Amah und Schiphchah', VT 8 (1958) 293-297.

slave deference. In prayer, whenever עֶבֶד is used in relation to God, its opposite, אֲדֹנָי 'lord/master', is usually replaced by YHWH (often in the vocative). This is in contrast to narrative in which אֲדֹנָי ('my lord') frequently appears without the corresponding use of 'your servant' (see Chapters 7.4 and 8.4). A third inadequacy is that metaphorical implications are overlooked. For example, Lindhagen discusses the religious uses of עֶבֶד with a focus on the need of obedience of the עֶבֶד of God, and Riesener, followed by Schultz, argues that the deferential use of שִׁפְחָה carries the implication of readiness to serve.<sup>36</sup> A fourth is that some guiding principle is used to organise the list of meanings and sometimes gives forced interpretations of some uses of the slave terms. This is particularly the case with Zimmerli and Baltzer, who both state at the outset that the עֶבֶד word-group has to do with 'relationship' and then assume or imply that all relationships for which the word-group is used are qualitatively the same (see Chapter 10.3).<sup>37</sup>

My intention is not simply to repeat the lexica and theological dictionaries. Nor do I want to develop or assume a framework of interpretation and then impose that upon all uses of the slave terms in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, my intention is to study how slavery terms are used in the Hebrew Bible to build a picture of how characters in narrative and the 'voice' in psalms are portrayed to others and God, and ultimately to discuss how the use of slave deference portrays the worshipper to God.

#### 1.4. OUTLINE

This chapter (Chapter 1) summarises the state of scholarship on ancient systems of slavery, to show why I wish to discuss the topic of slavery terms in the context of deference and in relation to God, and where my project fits into scholarship.

Chapter 2 presents and defends my approach of analysis. My method of analysis is a combined application of metaphor theory and politeness theory. The former enables understanding of

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<sup>36</sup> Lindhagen, 262-291; Ingrid Riesener, *Der Stamm 'bd in Alten Testament. Eine Wortuntersuchung unter Berücksichtigung neuerer sprachwissenschaftlicher Methoden* (BZAW 149; Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1979) 83; Richard Schultz, 'שִׁפְחָה, Šíphâ', in *NIDOTTE* (ed., W. A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997, Vol 4) 212.

<sup>37</sup> Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 11; K. Baltzer, 'Liberation from Debt Slavery after the Exile in Second Isaiah and Nehemiah', in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds, P.D. Miller Jr, P.D. Hanson, S.D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 478

how slave terms are used in non-literal contexts, such as in deference to people and God, and as a title. The latter indicates that deferential use of slave language is part of general politeness and cautions against using master-slave deference alone as a marker for respectful speech. Recognition that master-slave deference is a common form of politeness in both biblical and extra-biblical texts matches with metaphor theory to show that עֶבֶד and אֲדֹנָי in deference are lexicalised. That is, they are not vehicles that automatically call up associations of slavery. However, when the context indicates that metaphorical import occurs, metaphor theory allows for analysis as to what associations of slavery are being evoked. Metaphor theory also helps to discover what associations of slavery lie behind master-slave deference and the use of עֶבֶד in other contexts such as titles ('servant' of the king, 'servant' of God), all of which are lexicalised.

Chapter 3 discusses the use of slave language in the Hebrew Bible. To be able to understand what is intended by the use of slave terms in deference or for titles, a review of slavery is undertaken. This allows for possible associations of slavery to be drawn out that may lie behind a particular use of slave terms. To set the scene, the biblical portrayal of slavery in ancient Israel is described. My focus differs from previous scholarship in that I draw out possible associations, or metaphorical descriptors for slavery. These are 'possession' (with the derived association, 'control'), 'inferior status', 'work', 'debt/poverty', 'oppression', and 'propensity to run away'. Six key categories of metaphoric use, subjects and officials to the king, vassalship, personal servants, people in relation to God, and deference, are then discussed, and the relevant associations from the list above connected with these uses. Another association, 'loyalty', not drawn from ancient Israelite thinking of slavery, is also found. Though Israelites did not have a conception of 'the faithful slave' as did Greeks, loyalty, or at least obedience, is presupposed. This chapter, by referencing to ancient Near Eastern literature, also indicates that the various non-literal uses of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible reflects a practice that long antedates the Bible, and proves true the comment above for Chapter 2 that generally the non-literal uses of slave language is lexicalised.

Chapter 4 is a listing of all types of use of the slave terms in the Hebrew Bible. It is essentially a philological listing, similar to that found in theological and Hebrew/Aramaic dictionaries. However, it is organised on a basis of increasing metaphoricity, from the primary meaning of the main Hebrew term for slave, עֶבֶד, as 'work', then 'slavery'. The list shows the

increasing metaphoricity of the use of עֶבֶד and synonyms from ‘worker’ to ‘servant’ to ‘official’ to deferential use then to its use in relation to God.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 5 addresses the suitability of politeness theory as a tool for analysis of biblical texts. It is applied to Num 20:14-21 and the Lachish letters as test cases. Num 20:14-21 is a two round interaction between Israel and Edom over Israel’s request to pass through the territory of Edom near the end of the ‘wilderness’ period. The Lachish letters are brief written communications by junior military officials to their senior. Num 20:14-21 is a literary text whereas the Lachish letters are non-literary, which allows politeness theory to be tested on these two text types. The Lachish letters were suitable for testing the theory because of the small number, one provenance of the texts, and assumed single recipient of the extant readable inscriptions. They also provide correlation with master-slave deference in biblical texts. In both cases, it is found that politeness theory is a suitable tool for analysis and some patterns of speaking were determined, some of which were recognised to be biblical practice. The Lachish letters show that master-slave deference is an integral part of Israelite culture, reflecting awareness of a stratified society, yet not so rigid that subordinates and social inferiors could not express emotion or dissatisfaction to superiors. The Hebrew Bible shows this same pattern.

Chapter 6 combines the use of both metaphor and politeness theory on two literary texts in the Samuel narratives in which master-slave deference is frequently used: 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14:1-22. Both were chosen because the people using master-slave deference were either acting in roles outside the usual roles for such people (e.g. Abigail, the wealthy woman taking the inferior role to David, the outlaw) or were using polite language to manipulate the hearer (Abigail to David; the wise woman of Tekoa to David). The importance of the discussion is to show that politeness has an inherent ambiguity, which can be exploited by a speaker. It is also found that the use of master-slave deference changed with the immediate subject matter in each woman’s speech, similar to what happens in the Lachish letters. When Abigail defends herself or requests, she uses master-slave deference, but when she takes the role of prophet/teacher, it is lessened. Similarly, the Tekoite woman uses master-slave deference in

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Increasing metaphoricity’ is somewhat arbitrary. The list is organised on the basis of the use of עֶבֶד and synonyms in contexts that increasingly move away from the ‘work’ environment, then the slavery environment. Treating the use of slave terms in relation to God as the most metaphoric is essentially a present day construct, but the argument is presented in Chapter 2.1.

requests, self-defence and critique of David, but it lessens when she explains her coming to the king. When she is exposed, master-slave deference remains lessened and flattery becomes prominent. Overall, Abigail uses master-slave deference more frequently than the Tekoite woman, but she also uses *אמה* and *שפחה* beyond their conventional or lexicalised usage whereas the Tekoite woman did not. Abigail's non-lexicalised use of *אמה* and *שפחה* also draws upon the idea of slavery as inferior to free, and highlights her general role in her speaking as inferior to David in contrast with the narrative's portrayal of her as a woman of wealth and status.

Chapter 7 continues the same combined use of politeness and metaphor theory, but this time for speaking interactions in the book of Genesis. Characters' speaking in Genesis ranges from the very deferential (44:18-34 is the classic example) to nil, so they were classified into the types of deference used (*עבדך־אדני*, *אדני־אתה*, *עבדך־אתה*, none), and each group of speaking types analysed. Reasons are also offered as to why less or nil master-slave deference is used when, from other biblical texts, it would be expected that master-slave deference would be found. As with the analysis of 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14, characters employ a range of politeness strategies. It is also found, contrary to the Samuel passages, that master-slave deference tends to be confined to the introduction of a character's speech and sometimes the conclusion as well (that is, it is a frame for the speech). When a request is made, it may use master-slave deference, depending on its position in the speech. Generally, as for both David and Abigail in 1 Sam 25, if the speech is not part of a dialogue, the request is placed last. Accordingly, if master-slave deference does not frame the speech, the request will not use master-slave deference. When the latent metaphoricity in master-slave deference is played upon in a given narrative, it either calls up associations of possession (e.g. Joseph's brothers in Gen 44, when they offer themselves as slaves to Joseph because of the 'theft' of the silver cup; the Egyptians to Joseph in Gen 47 during the famine) or work (Abraham and Lot serve their visitors in Gen 18 and 19).

Chapter 8 moves discussion to consider the use of slave terms in poetic or wisdom literature. It focuses primarily on Psalms, because of the occasional use of *עבד* as a replacement for 'I' in deference to God. This is similar to master-slave deference in biblical narrative, but there is a change in emphasis: it draws attention to loyalty. This is shown clearly by the context of use: when *עבד* is used as a term of deference, it is only found in the context of laments or prayer

psalms, and nearly always with statements of loyalty and/or requests for help to be loyal to God. The critical issue, who is the voice in the psalms is discussed, because of the frequent association in scholarship of the individual voice in many psalms with the Israelite king. It is found that in some cases that the voice using עֶבֶד for deference is that of the king, but for the majority of cases it is not. Thus a long standing view that 'your servant' in Psalms refers to the king is found to be incorrect. It is also found that when the metaphoricity of עֶבֶד is played upon, it looks to chattel slavery, not the court. It is also found that the language of prayer is consistently more direct than characters' speaking in narrative. This chapter also considers for the first time in my study (except for the list in Chapter 4) the use of עֶבֶד as a designation for significant people, such as David, the patriarchs and Moses. It is found that this use עֶבֶד carries the idea of status as well as loyalty.

Chapter 9 discusses the use of slave terms in the remaining grouping of biblical literature yet to be covered: prophetic books. This chapter builds on Chapter 8 because of the prophetic literature's main use of slave terms for titles: for Israel, prophets, kings, Moses, the patriarchs, the Servant figure of Isa 40-55 and the occasional other individual. All these uses are in relation to God. The metaphorical use of slave terms is found to draw mostly on the idea of slavery as loyalty, reflected in obedience. For prophets and the Servant figure of Isa 40-55, it is found that the use of 'servant' for them in relation to God plays very much on slavery as control, an idea associated with slavery as 'possession': God directs them in what they say, where they go, to whom they speak, and in some cases, how they present their messages. In four cases, prophets' private lives become part of their message.

Chapter 10 draws the threads together. There is also a discussion on the question, does the use of עֶבֶד for people and deference in relation to God call up associations from the royal court, or does it call up associations with slavery? That is, is God portrayed as 'king' with the use of עֶבֶד for worshippers and people designated as God's עֲבָדִים? The chapter, and this thesis, concludes by summarising the main associations of slavery inherent in the various non-slave uses of slavery terminology and how they vary between the different uses. These are: 'inferior status' and 'work'. These associations lie behind the use of slave terms for titles (e.g. servant of the king) and for people in relation to God (e.g. prophets and Moses as 'servant' of God). The latter also calls up the derived association of 'loyalty' and 'possession'. Vassalship is closely associated with chattel slavery. Deference calls up the association, 'inferior status',

though when used in prayer, it also calls up the derived association, 'loyalty'. In deference, the power of slave language becomes evident: it is used by the speaker to construct an identity that assists the purpose of speaking. Sometimes this identity is counterfactual to what is expected, but nevertheless is effective.





## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY: METAPHOR AND POLITENESS THEORY

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

My analysis of the metaphorical use of slave terms for deference, titles, and ultimately in connection with God will draw upon politeness theory, metaphor theory, and for narrative texts, narrative theory. Politeness theory has been chosen because it analyses in a systematic fashion language production in human interaction. As will be discussed in Section 2.3, it is an important theory in cultural studies, yet is rarely used in biblical studies. Since biblical narrative contains much dialogue and conversation which in turn frequently includes master-slave deference, politeness theory should be more widely used as a tool to assist interpretation of narrative. A theory of metaphor is needed since the use of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible outside of the context of slavery proper immediately suggests metaphorical usage. In addition, the use of עֶבֶד or אֲמָה for self-reference in relation to God is by default metaphorical, since the concept of having a relationship with a god can only be understood by analogy with terms that are drawn from human life.<sup>1</sup> Applying metaphor theory also helps to avoid obvious and commonplace analysis that does not add to the body of knowledge on biblical dialogue or in biblical prayer. Narrative theory is required so that discussion of slave terms for narrative texts can keep in mind how story-telling works which helps determinations of how slave terms in deference are used to construct identity.

#### 2.2. METAPHOR THEORY

##### 2.2.1. Description

‘A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes one entity or realm of experience in terms borrowed from another. It incorporates features that may be recognised as apt in reference to the entity being described and other features that are clearly inapplicable.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is especially so in the Hebrew Bible, ‘since the Old Testament consistently portrays God as having no physical form’ (A.L. Warren-Rothlin, ‘Body Idioms and The Psalms’, in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* [eds, P.S. Johnston, D.G. Firth; Leicester: Apollos, 2005] 210). Consequently, as Warren-Rothlin argues, idiomatic (or metaphorical) meaning in relation to God can be assumed.

<sup>2</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (NSBT; Leicester: Apollos, 1999) 19. C.f. Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh’s Wife* (SBLDS 130; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992) 6.

This definition seems simple enough to work with, but it hides much difficulty in defining what metaphor is and how it works as a figure of speech. For example, just defining ‘metaphor’ will anticipate the approach a given researcher will apply to the trope. Lakoff and Johnson’s well-known definition, ‘The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another,’<sup>3</sup> anticipates the cognitive theory of metaphor they develop to understand both metaphor and how it is used. Chiappe’s definition, ‘Metaphors and similes relate a topic (e.g., “crime”) and a vehicle (“disease”),’<sup>4</sup> anticipates their discussion on the difference between metaphor and simile. Schmitt’s definition, the literal meaning of a word or phrase is transferred to a second, often abstract, target area,<sup>5</sup> is used by the Pragglejaz group in their proposal of a method of analysis that can detect metaphors. Kittay broadens the definition to ‘metaphors are sentences, not isolated words,’<sup>6</sup> in recognition that metaphors are more than individual words. Similarly, Ricoeur understands metaphor to be ‘the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality,’<sup>7</sup> to take into account that both the sentence is the basic unit of meaning in a discourse and that discourse itself creates meaning. Soskice, likewise, broadens the definition to ‘a speaking of one thing in terms which are seen as suggestive of another,’<sup>8</sup> to allow for the case when the term being described by the other is not mentioned explicitly. In a similar vein to Kittay and Soskice, Ritchie defines metaphor as, ‘Metaphor alters the way one concept (the topic) is experienced by suppressing context-irrelevant simulators and activating context-relevant simulators associated with another (the vehicle), and connecting them with the topic.’<sup>9</sup> His language of ‘simulators’ reflects his communication and neural (brain) theory approach to discussing metaphor. The difficulty of defining

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<sup>3</sup> George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live by* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 5.

<sup>4</sup> D.L. Chiappe, J.M. Kennedy, T. Smykowski, ‘Reversibility, Aptness, and the Conventionality of Metaphors and Similes’, *MS* 18 (2003) 85 [in abstract].

<sup>5</sup> R. Schmitt, ‘Systematic metaphor analysis as a method of qualitative research.’ *The Qualitative Report* 10 (2005) 358-394, cited in Pragglejaz Group, ‘MIP: A Method for Identifying Metaphorically used Words in Discourse’, *MS* 22 (2007) 34.

<sup>6</sup> E.F. Kittay, *Metaphor, its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 23.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (University of Toronto Romance Series 37; transs. R. Czerny, K. McLaughlin, J. Costello; Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977) 7.

<sup>8</sup> J.M. Soskice, *Metaphors and Religious Language* (Oxford, Clarendon: 1985) 49, cited in Galambush, *Jerusalem*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> L. David Ritchie, *Context and Connection in Metaphor* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 169.

metaphor is highlighted by Deignan, who indicates that the researcher must define what they mean by ‘metaphor’ before they start their analysis of the trope!<sup>10</sup>

Despite the difficulties of defining metaphor, there is recognition that metaphor works as a figure of speech in a particular way. To use the traditional form of the trope, *X is (a) Y*, *X* is recognised to be the topic, or in Richards, terminology, the ‘tenor’ that is being described by *Y*, commonly referred to as the ‘vehicle’.<sup>11</sup> Metaphor works by postulating that some attributes of *Y* are similar enough to *X* to make *Y* an apt descriptor of *X* (sometimes called the ‘ground’). However, by default, there are other similarities between *X* and *Y* that are not used (often called the ‘tension’).<sup>12</sup> This using of some attributes and non-use of other attributes gives metaphor its power as a figure of speech,<sup>13</sup> keeps the meaning open-ended, and is the key topic of discussion in metaphor theory and research since Black. It is a form of loosening up language from its literal form.<sup>14</sup>

Part of the problem of analysing metaphors is that not all metaphors are in the form, *X is (a) Y*. They can be predicative, such as *I am poured out* (Ps 22:14), and *the LORD will swallow them* (Ps 21:9).<sup>15</sup> Sometimes the tenor/topic is implied rather than stated, such as in the statement, *you cows of Bashan* (Amos 4:1a). From the description of the ‘cows’ as persons who live in Samaria and who oppress the poor and use their husbands as drink-waiters, the topic/tenor, which is not specified, is indulgent women, and most likely wealthy (inferred from their ability to oppress the poor, and drinking as representing leisure time). When a text does not state the topic/tenor, it is possible to misinterpret the metaphorical meaning (because

<sup>10</sup> Alice Deignan, ‘Corpus-based Research into Metaphor’, in *Researching and Applying Metaphor* (CALS; eds, L. Cameron, G. Low; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 184. See also Kittay, *Metaphor*, 95.

<sup>11</sup> I.A. Richards, *Basic English and its Uses* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1943)

<sup>12</sup> C.f. Max Black, ‘Metaphor’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1955) 286-290; Ricoeur, *Rule*, 22-23, 216-256. This was also recognised by Aristotle: ‘a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars’ (*Poetics* 1459 a 3-8; also *Rhetoric* 1412 a 10; quoted in Ricoeur, *Rule*, 23).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., J. Savant, ‘Follow that Metaphor’, *Commonweal* 132:20 (2005); Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, ‘Body Images in the Psalms’, *JSOT* 28 (2004) 304, 308, 325 (for biblical poetry); R. Wiseman, ‘Ancient Roman Metaphors for Communication’, *MS* 22 (2007) 41, who notes ‘the sheer power of metaphors to shape our imaginations’; R. Swinnerton, ‘Mis-Perception: Metaphor as a Metaphor for the Reception of Fictional Narratives’, *Humanity* 1 (2007) 2, 8.

[[<http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/humanity/2007/rswinnerton.html>]] Accessed 3 June 2008

<sup>14</sup> D.L. Chiappe, J.M. Kennedy, ‘Literal Bases for Metaphor and Simile’, *MS* 16 (2001) 265-266.

<sup>15</sup> Noted by Warren-Rothlin, ‘Body Idioms,’ 200. Black starts his discussion of metaphor with a predicative metaphor, ‘the chairman ploughed through the discussion’ (‘Metaphor,’ 274-276).

the text gives inadequate information<sup>16</sup>), or conflate aspects of the implied attributes with the metaphorical meaning, which Day argues occurs in studies of ‘stripping’ as punishment of the metaphorical prostitute/adulterer in Ezek 16:35-37 and Hos 2:4-5.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes the topic/tenor of one metaphor is at the same time the vehicle of another metaphor. When this happens, it suggests that not only can metaphors be piled on top of one another, but there may be different levels of metaphor in language. In addition, a sentence or even a whole text can be an extended metaphor. This is well-known for poetic and literary texts, but can be the case for other texts even if there is no use of metaphorical language in that text. As the Pragglejaz Group comment, ‘Metaphorical concepts can be found without metaphorical language, as with allegory and symbol.’<sup>18</sup> Biblical texts such as the ‘allegories’ of Ezek 16, 20 and 23 and Nathan’s parable of 2 Sam 21:1-6 are well known as extended metaphors.<sup>19</sup> The opposite can also happen: ‘metaphorical language can be found without metaphorical concepts when a metaphorical expression is not processed metaphorically by either producer or receiver.’<sup>20</sup>

The study of metaphor, therefore, has to take into account why the metaphor was chosen. That is, what the vehicle (word, sentence, text) conveys that is apt to describe the topic/tenor (and what is not), how it impacts on the hearer/reader, and how the hearer/reader recognises metaphor and responds to it.

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<sup>16</sup> C.f. Kittay, *Metaphor*, 32, dealing with metaphors lifted out context. The issue with Amos 4:1a is that the prophecy originally had a specified tenor/topic: *you*—the original audience of the prophecy, which is omitted in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Peggy L. Day, ‘Metaphor and Social Reality: Isaiah 23.17-18, Ezekiel 16.35-37 and Hosea 2.4-5’, in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Herbert B. Huffman* (eds, J. Kaltner, L. Stulman; London, New York: Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004) 67. See also her earlier article, ‘Adulterous Jerusalem’s Imagined Demise: Death of a Metaphor in Ezekiel XVI’, *VT* 50 (2000) 285-309. Day’s contention is that most scholarship argues that the ‘stripping’ of the metaphorical adulterer or prostitute reflects a punishment of such people in biblical society, which is not stated in any biblical text; whereas ‘stripping’ reflects warfare and natural disaster language common at the time, and therefore is as metaphorical as ‘prostitute/adulterer’ in the two texts.

<sup>18</sup> Pragglejaz Group, ‘MIP,’ 24. C.f. Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, ‘A Fresh Look at Amos 4:1-3 and its Imagery’, *VT* 59 (2009) 465: ‘illogical and irregular use of language fits well into the world of metaphor,’ said in connection with grammatical inconsistencies in Amos 4:1-3.

<sup>19</sup> In 2 Sam 12, Nathan’s statement to David, ‘You are the man!’ (v.7), the metaphoricity of the parable is reduced to the vehicle ‘man’. In 1 Sam 14:3-11, the Tekoite woman keeps her fictitious plea as metaphor, by not identifying Absalom with the fratricide son. C.f. Ted Cohen, ‘Metaphor, Feeling, and Narrative’, *Philosophy and Literature* 21 (1997) 232-238. Many of Jesus’ parables can also be viewed as extended metaphors.

<sup>20</sup> Pragglejaz Group, ‘MIP,’ 25.

The study of how metaphor works and its effectiveness goes back to Aristotle.<sup>21</sup> However, it is probably true to say that current metaphor study and the development of metaphor theory owe their origins to Black, who in the 1950s took metaphor study out of the domain of poetry studies.<sup>22</sup>

Black's discussion of why metaphor is effective focuses on three matters. First is the relationship of attributes between topic/tenor and vehicle. Why are some attributes apt and others inapt? Second, aptness and inaptness was explained as how popular understandings of the vehicle, which he calls 'associated commonplaces', are mapped to the topic/tenor. Third, it is the context in which the metaphor is produced that determines which associated commonplaces are mapped and not mapped to the topic/tenor. Black understood the context as the sentence in which the metaphor is placed: it provides a frame for choosing which commonplace associations are apt and inapt.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Black indicated metaphor classifies rather than compares (a view usually attributed to Aristotle<sup>24</sup>) and which has become a topic of research and debate, especially amongst empirical researchers.<sup>25</sup>

These three foci of Black's remain prominent in discussions of metaphor, especially the matter of context. Scholarship may debate whether metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon only (most theorists) or derives from human experience of the world (i.e. pre-linguistic; Lakoff and Johnson<sup>26</sup>) and whether the hearer/reader or author/speaker is the primary factor in

<sup>21</sup> Discussed fully in Ricoeur, *Rule*, 9-43; and noted in Marc Z. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSS 76; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) 27; Chiappe et al, 'Reversibility,' 86; and Z. Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 9-10. An edition of the primary text is Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* (New York: Putnam, 1941 [repr]).

<sup>22</sup> Max Black, 'Metaphor', 273-294. See also his *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962) and 'More on Metaphor', *Dialectica* 31 (1977) 431-457.

<sup>23</sup> Black, 'Metaphor,' 276.

<sup>24</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *Rule*, 9, 21-27, who refutes this understanding of Aristotle.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Chiappe and Kennedy, 'Literal Bases,' 249-276; Chiappe et al, 'Reversibility,' 85-105; Sam Glucksberg, Mary R. Newsome, Yevgeniya Goldvarg, 'Inhibition of the Literal: Filtering Metaphor-Irrelevant Information During Metaphor Comprehension', *MS* 16 (2001) 277-298. In contrast, the Pragglejaz Group maintain that metaphor is a comparative process (Pragglejaz Group, 'MIP,' 31-32).

<sup>26</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 56ff. See also George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and other Dangerous Things: What Categories reveal about the Mind* (Chicago: Uni of Chicago Press, 1987) and George Lakoff, and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: Uni of Chicago Press, 1989). For studies that support Lakoff and Johnson's contention that humans conceptualise without the need for language, see Maurice Bloch, 'Language, Anthropology and Cognitive Science', *Man* 26 (1991) 183-198; and Margaret Archer, 'Realism and the Problem of Agency', *Journal of Critical Realism* (OS) 5 (2002) 13-14. Lakoff and Johnson's idea of 'conceptual metaphors' is frequently used. See e.g. Philip Eubanks, 'Globalization, "Corporate Rule," and Blended Worlds: A Conceptual-Rhetorical Analysis of Metaphor, Metonymy, and Conceptual Blending', *MS* 20 (2005) 180-183 (for political and social debate); Wiseman, 'Ancient Roman Metaphors,' 41-78 (Roman metaphors for communication); Orly Goldwasser, 'Where is Metaphor?: Conceptual Metaphor and

understanding a metaphor, but the issue of context remains prominent in discussion.<sup>27</sup> All theorists recognise that for a metaphor to be understandable, either by speaker/author or hearer/reader, a context is needed. An author/speaker uses context to generate a metaphor as part of the rhetoric of discourse. A reader/hearer interprets a metaphor on the basis of the context of the text/utterance and their own experience. Metaphor theorists tend to focus on one side or other of this phenomenon, with Black, Lakoff and Johnson, and Kittay focussing on metaphor production and Ricouer focussing on metaphor reception. Ricouer's discussion of metaphor in the context of discourse reception in particular highlights the open-ended nature of metaphor (noted above). Ritchie attempts to bring both aspects of context together in his contextual theory of metaphor, arguing that it is through language, affected by experience, that metaphors are both produced and understood. Differences in language experience, and hence memory of language use and context of that use, determines whether a metaphor is received as the author/speaker intended it.<sup>28</sup>

### **2.2.2. Applicability to the Hebrew Bible**

The high incidence of imagery in the Hebrew Bible, and the many poetic texts within it make metaphor theory an obvious method for interpreting biblical texts. However, there are some problems. First, what is metaphor versus metonymy or synecdoche? Second, if a figure is determined to be metaphorical, is it novel, live, or lexicalised? There are no living Israelites who can provide a control for this. Biblical texts, being literary, give an author/complier's production of a metaphor, not the original audiences' understanding; and the long history of compilation of texts into the present books allows for the possibilities that what was once novel became lexicalised, and yet the text it is in may still reflect its original novel setting. These problems can be highlighted with two examples. Day's generally excellent and

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Alternative Classification in the Hieroglyphic Script', *MS* 20 (2005) 95-113 (Egyptian hieroglyphics); and Job Y. Jindo, 'Toward a Poetics of the Biblical Mind: Language, Culture, and Cognition', *VT* 59 (2009) 222-243 (biblical texts).

<sup>27</sup> C.f. Sharon Moughton-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 31: the most significant tenet of metaphor theory is 'Context, context, context.'

<sup>28</sup> Ritchie, *Context*, 96-202. Ritchie builds his theory on cognitive studies' argument that human experiences create neural pathways in the brain. A second set of pathways are created through simulation; that is, humans can 'remember', 'recreate', 'imagine' experiences, often with physiological effects as though they are experiencing what they are thinking about or imagining. Language is an integral part of this 'simulation'. Consequently, Ritchie affirms Lakoff and Johnson's argument that human experience is a prime factor in understanding, but at the same time argues that language can generate metaphor, not just experience.

sophisticated application of metaphor theory to the image of a prostitute being stripped and beaten suffers from the problem of assuming that the image is a ‘live’ metaphor for Ezekiel’s audience for YHWH’s response to their breach of the covenant.<sup>29</sup> In a study of Akkadian ‘dingir.sa.dib.ba’ incantations, Lambert has difficulty deciding whether the self-designation ‘slave’ in these prayers is metaphoric (given its frequent use in the ancient Near East in this sense) or is literal; that is refers to a chattel slave.<sup>30</sup>

Generally, the use of metaphor theory for biblical interpretation has proceeded in two directions. One is a simple relating of images and/or metaphors on the basis of topic, theme or type, without a systematic interpretation of the data to propose what ancient Israelites understood about the topic or types of images in question.<sup>31</sup> A second is the coupling of metaphor theory with ideological or post-colonial criticism, represented especially by feminist scholarship’s focus on marriage metaphors and the use of women or female characters as negative figures. In this scholarship, both Black and Lakoff and Johnson’s theories are called upon, and usually married with Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor and discourse analysis, to focus on the reception of the texts studied.<sup>32</sup> However, some other studies have been done outside of these two approaches, including the application of metaphor theory to the description of Ba’al in the Ugaritic text, *KTU* 1.101.<sup>33</sup>

The metaphoric use of slave terms has yet to be subjected to analysis informed by metaphor theory. Despite the pervasiveness of scholarship’s understanding that metaphorical uses of עֶבֶד

<sup>29</sup> Day, ‘Adulterous,’ 285-309.

<sup>30</sup> Lambert, W.G., ‘Dingir.sa.dib.ba Incantations’, *JNES* 33 (1974) 267-270, 272-322. Lambert’s problem arises from the word for ‘slave’ in his text I, lines 78-79, being a translation from the Sumerian *šubur*, the usual word for a bought slave.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Gillmayr-Bucher, ‘Body Images,’ 301-326; Warren-Rothlin, ‘Body Idioms’; Brettler, *God is King*. Brettler’s conclusions in *God is King* are particularly disappointing. In the light of the extensive and continuing discussion about ancient Israelite perception of monarchy, its role in the cult, and how it affected perceptions of God, the material presented by Brettler provided the perfect opportunity to analyse it and propose an understanding of how ancient Israelites perceived God. As far as I can tell, this has yet to be done.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Moughton-Mumby, *Sexual*; Galambush, *Jerusalem*; Day, ‘Adulterous’; ‘Metaphor’; Claudia V. Camp, ‘Metaphor in Feminist Biblical Interpretation: Theoretical Perspectives’, *Semeia* 61 (1993) 3-36; Karin Adams, ‘Metaphor and Dissonance: A Reinterpretation of Hosea 4:13-14’, *JBL* 127 (2008) 291-305; Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Katie M. Heffelfinger, ‘Like the Sitting of a Mountain: The Significance of Metaphor in *KTU* 1.101’s (recto) Description of Ba’al’, *UF* 39 (2007) 381-397; Marc Z. Brettler, ‘Images of YHWH the Warrior in Psalms’, *Semeia* 61 (1993) 135-165; Øystein Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55* (FAT 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 30-43.

derives from the court (see Chapter 10.2), no sophisticated study has been made on this use of the term, not even by Brettler in *God is King*.

A rare example of the use of metaphor theory to the metaphoric use of slave terms in biblical writings is given in Harris, *Slave of Christ*, who discusses the use of δοῦλος in relation to Christ in the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> In what appears to be an application of Black's version of the interactive theory,<sup>35</sup> Harris considers points of aptness to be exclusive ownership by, and complete dependence on, the master; and points of inaptness to be, 'enforced obedience', 'loss of freedom', and 'cringing subservience'. In determining these, he recognises the complexity of metaphorical uses of δοῦλος, due to the Greco-Roman practice of slavery and the early Christians' familiarity with the LXX. That is, there are many possible associations (using Ritchie's terminology) which New Testament authors could draw upon when using slave language. However, he argues that the LXX restricted what associations could be used.<sup>36</sup> As his book proceeds, Harris keeps in mind aptness and inaptness of slavery language, discussing them at length in pp.139-156.

With regards to the metaphorical use of slave language in the Hebrew Bible, rarely is it used in the form *X is a slave/servant*. It appears in this form in Ps 116:16; 119:125; 143:12; and Gen 50:18 (plural) but is otherwise simply used as *your servant/s* (עבדך/עבדך) in prayer<sup>37</sup> and by characters in narratives, and as *my/his/your servant/s* for prophets. This makes עבד a key metaphor to indicate relationship. However, as already noted in Chapter 1, this relationship is asymmetrical.<sup>38</sup> That is, when עבד or אמה is used by a speaker in a narrative, or is used in prayer, the hearer is usually a social superior (another person, God). Beyond this, the texts themselves in which עבד and אמה are used metaphorically need to be analysed to understand the ground; that is, associations of slavery that may be evoked. Generally, I will focus on how

<sup>34</sup> Another example of study of slavery metaphor that includes the New Testament is I.A.H. Combes, *The Metaphor of Slavery in the Writings of the Early Church* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Harris is dependent on prior New Testament scholarship application of metaphor theory (*Slave of Christ*, 19), such as K.C. Russell, 'Slavery as Reality and Metaphor in the Non-Pauline New Testament Books', *RUO* 42 (1972) 439-469; idem, *Slavery as Reality and Metaphor in the Pauline Letters* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1968); and H. Crabtree, *The Christian Life: Traditional Metaphors and Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 11-17.

<sup>36</sup> Harris *Slave*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 8.2 for the use of עבד in Psalms, Chapter 8.3 for its use in other prayers, and E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 313-320, for its use in prayer in Judg-2 Kgs.

<sup>38</sup> Affirmed in Revell, *Designation*, 267-269. Revell's analysis is assisted by politeness theory, which is described in Section 2.3.2 below.



the metaphoric use of slave terms in deference adds to a speaker's identity construction, and assists with them achieving the objectives of their communication.

My analysis of the metaphoric use of slave terms will draw directly from Ritchie's contextual theory, including his ideas of 'lexicalised metaphor' and 'counterfactual scenario'. 'Lexicalised metaphor' draws upon the well known phenomenon of metaphors having a life, ranging from 'novel' (i.e. newly invented), to 'conventional', and finally to 'dead' (all metaphorical associations are lost).<sup>39</sup> Ritchie critiques the idea of dead metaphor, preferring to argue that metaphors never fully lose their metaphorical import, which remains latent until a context of production or reception activates or evokes it.<sup>40</sup> This view has also been argued by others.<sup>41</sup> That is, a metaphor's life is from 'novel' to 'dormant'.

A 'counterfactual scenario' occurs when two terms or concepts are categorically different and used for effect by the communicator, or a term or statement is used opposite to what is expected. For example, in the slogan, *X for President*, *X* may be Margaret Thatcher, Homer Simpson or Mickey Mouse, all of whom are known by both communicator and receptor to be not seriously considered for candidacy for the President of the United States (non-citizen, fictitious).<sup>42</sup> Counterfactual scenarios may also be unintentional, as in President Ford's 'immortal observation: "Solar technology cannot be introduced overnight."<sup>43</sup> In this latter example, 'overnight' is metaphoric for 'quickly'. Some biblical examples of counterfactual scenarios are: Amos' statements, *prepare to meet your God* (Amos 4:12c) and parody of the *day of YHWH* (Amos 5:18-20) from what his original audience expected; Jacob and Abigail's metaphoric use of *your servant* respectively to Esau and David (Gen 33; 1 Sam 25); and the Tekoite woman's overturning of her status as *servant* to David (a subject) to critique David for a breach of justice (2 Sam 14).<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> This was popularised by Lakoff and Johnson, but had been recognised earlier. See, Black, 'More', 439; M.C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958) 112-113 and Ricouer, *Rule*, 191, 214. C.f. Moughton-Mumby, *Sexual*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Ritchie, *Context*, 126, 160-163, 169, 172.

<sup>41</sup> C. Müller, *Metaphors Dead and Alive, Sleeping and Waking: A Dynamic View* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008); Camp, 'Metaphor,' 14-17; Praggeljaz Group, 'MIP,' 30; William Grey, 'Metaphor and Meaning', *Minerva* 4 (2000) (<http://www.ul.ie/~philos/vol4/metaphor.html>).

<sup>42</sup> Ritchie, *Context*, 159.

<sup>43</sup> Grey, 'Metaphor'.

<sup>44</sup> The scenarios in 1 Sam 25, 2 Sam 14 and Gen 33, are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Practically, I will:

- Determine various associations of slavery that might be drawn upon from the biblical portrayal of slavery. In this, I will use the terms ‘literal’ and ‘associations’ rather than Ritchie’s specialised language of ‘primary association’ (equivalent to ‘literal meaning’) and ‘secondary association’ (equivalent to metaphoric meaning).
- Determine which of these associations best suit the various non-literal uses of master-slave deference used in the Hebrew Bible, which is determined by the context of use.
- Determine what uses of master-slave language may be ‘live’ or lexicalised. References to extra-biblical ancient Near Eastern texts will assist this process.
- Focus on the metaphorical use of master-slave language in the context of speaking and in relation to God.

Since the metaphorical use of slave language occurs in narrative, usually in the mouth of characters, and in prayer, my analysis of the metaphoricity of any given use of slave terms will be accompanied by analysis using literary theory and theories in language production and language use.

## **2.3. POLITENESS THEORY**

### **2.3.1. Description**

Chapter 1.2 has indicated the antiquity of the use of slave terms in deference before the biblical period. The study of deference falls into the category of linguistic study known as *honorifics*<sup>45</sup>, which itself is now recognised to be a category within a broader category now known as *politeness*, which itself is placed within the broader category of *pragmatics*; that is, the study of patterns of language. In relation to Robbins’ socio-rhetorical criticism model, pragmatics relates to the ‘inner texture’ of a text; but as will be indicated below, it can also relate to the ‘ideological texture’ of a text.

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<sup>45</sup> C.f. Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (SIS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 179, 276; Asif Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (SSCFL 24; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 301-332, esp. pp.301-303, 315-323; Joy Hendry, ‘To Wrap or Not to Wrap: Politeness and Penetration in Ethnographic Inquiry’, *Man* 24 (1989) 621; Shinichiro Okamoto, ‘Politeness and the Perception of Irony: Honorifics in Japanese’, *MS* 17 (2002) 119-201.

Deference and honorifics cannot be studied without some reference to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness as articulated in their work, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language*. This theory attempts to describe how people go about portraying an image or 'self' to others in the interests of social harmony in the context of actions that may disrupt relations. Fundamental to the theory is the contention that all people have a universal desire to honour 'face'.<sup>46</sup> This fundamental contention accounts for two things: why people use more words than needed when they interact with others, and why there is social order in human interaction.<sup>47</sup> 'Face' for Brown and Levinson is 'the want to be unimpeded and the want to be approved of in certain respects.'<sup>48</sup> Other scholars provide better definitions, some citing Goffman's definition of 'face', upon which Brown and Levinson built their theory: 'The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself [or herself] by the line others assume he [or she] has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social values.'<sup>49</sup> More simply, 'People care about how others see them. They use their talk to construct a version of themselves that is as positive as possible in the circumstances they face.'<sup>50</sup> That is, 'face' is a public perception of oneself.

Brown and Levinson, and Goffman, draw upon Durkheim's theory of positive and negative ritual theory<sup>51</sup> to argue that 'face' has a positive and a negative side. The positive side represents the desire for approval, and the negative side represents the desire to be autonomous. The advantage of conceptualising face into these two categories is that it allows for politeness to be seen as something broader than just using 'polite' words when making a request of another person, or engaging in 'polite behaviour' in the presence of social superiors. For example, affirming something about someone is also a form of politeness.

<sup>46</sup> The theory is described on pp.59-91, with the rest of the work giving detail and proofs.

<sup>47</sup> For the latter, see Thomas Holtgraves, 'The Linguistic Realization of Face Management: Implications for Language Production and Comprehension, Person Perception, and Cross-Cultural Communication', *SPQ* 55 (1992) 142, citing E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on face-to-face behaviour* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967) 44. For the former, Brown and Levinson's theory is in effect an attempt to explain why people do not use as efficient communication as possible, as defined by H.P. Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (eds, P. Cole, J. Morgan; New York, 1975) 41-58.

<sup>48</sup> Brown and Levinson, 58. See also p.61.

<sup>49</sup> Goffman *Interaction*, 5, cited in Daena J. Goldsmith, 'Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory', *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; eds, B.B. Whaley, W. Samter; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007) 220; Holtgraves, 'Linguistic Realization,' 142.

<sup>50</sup> Karen Tracy, 'Discourse and Identity: Language or Talk?' *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; eds, B.B. Whaley, W. Samter; Mahwah, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007) 26.

<sup>51</sup> Brown and Levinson, 59, 84, 129. See also Holtgraves, 'Linguistic Realization,' 141-144. The work in question is E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1915).

Brown and Levinson then argue that all human interaction presents a threat to face, either the speaker's or the addressee/hearer's, and therefore spoken communication is done in such a way to lessen the threat. This then is the focus of their theory: the addressing of face concerns results in specific spoken (linguistic) strategies, which Brown and Levinson claim are universal across cultures.

A key element of Brown and Levinson's theory is their attempt to correlate linguistic face-redressing strategies with the extent to which face is threatened in a given interaction. To assist this, Brown and Levinson argue that speakers will give only the amount of politeness that is required for the occasion. To measure this, Brown and Levinson devised the equation,

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$$

where  $W_x$  is the amount of face-threat the speaker's imposition on the hearer will generate,  $D(S,H)$  is the social distance between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H),  $P(H,S)$  is the relative power difference that the hearer has over the speaker, and  $R_x$  is the cultural weighting of the face-threatening action. This equation recognises that the perceived threat to face is a result of a combination of: the relationship between speaker and hearer, the relative power difference between the two, and a cultural value attached to the face-threatening action in question. Thus, if  $D$  is low (the speaker and hearer are intimates or social equals) but  $R$  is high, the speaker will be politer than he/she would normally be. Conversely, if  $D$  is high (speaker and hearer are strangers), then politeness will still be expected even if  $R$  is minimal. The assumption is that a precise value can be placed on  $D$ ,  $P$  and  $R$ . This aspect of Brown and Levinson's argument is the most critiqued. See Section 2.3.2 below and fn.81.

As a result of the claim to be able to measure face-threat in an interaction, Brown and Levinson grade a number of linguistic strategies that will give face-redress on the basis of the amount of face-redress they give. This starts with four 'super strategies', two of which are divided into a series of still further graded practical strategies. It needs to be noted that Brown and Levinson's strategies are based on situations of requests (also called, 'imposition'), and on interactions that involve one turn in a conversation.

The four 'super strategies' are:

- *Bald on-record*. This strategy gives the speaker's meaning in a clear manner. It is an 'impolite' strategy; that is, no face-redress is attempted.<sup>52</sup> A command without 'please', 'thankyou', or reasons (e.g. 'Help me with my research!') is an example of this strategy.
- *Positive politeness*. This strategy addresses the hearer's positive face. That is, the speaker affirms the hearer in some manner so that any negative impact of his/her meaning is lessened. This is used for small  $W_x$  and has little risk that the speaker's meaning will be missed by the hearer. A statement such as, 'I need your analytical skills for my research. Maybe we could publish a joint paper if you help me', is an example of this strategy.<sup>53</sup>
- *Negative politeness*. This strategy addresses the hearer's negative face. That is, the speaker attempts to lessen the impact of his/her meaning on the autonomy of the hearer. Brown and Levinson consider this strategy to be more polite than positive politeness and so used for higher  $W_x$ , but it suffers the increased risk of the speaker's intention being missed by the hearer (eg. the hearer does not do what is requested). Examples of this strategy could be, 'I'm sorry to bother you, but can you help me: I'm stuck on an aspect of my research', or, 'If you are willing, please can you help me in my research.'
- *Off-record*. This strategy addresses face concerns by keeping the meaning of the communication ambiguous. That is, the speaker in effect shows concern for the hearer's face by giving the hearer freedom to interpret the meaning of the communication, and then to respond as they wish. Brown and Levinson consider this to be the most polite strategy and so used for high  $W_x$ , but it suffers the risk of the speaker's meaning being missed. A classic example of this strategy is when a person says, 'I'm stuck on something in my research,' but intends the hearer to help.

Of these four super strategies, Brown and Levinson focus most on *positive* and *negative politeness*. Tables 1 and 2 show how Brown and Levinson understand these two strategies to result in various practical strategies. In both tables, the strategies are numbered in order of

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<sup>52</sup> Brown and Levinson, 69, 94-96, define 'bald on record' as spoken interaction that keeps to Grice's maxims of efficient communication (Grice, 'Logic,' 41-58).

<sup>53</sup> Positive politeness can seem to be manipulation in Western society. That is, someone affirms something positive about someone, only to make a request of them. An example of positive politeness that is manipulation is found in 2 Sam 14:12-17, where a 'wise woman' ends her request to King David with the comment, *my lord the king is like the angel of God, discerning good and evil*. The best known biblical example of manipulation is the introduction to the question to Jesus about paying taxes to the Roman Emperor: *you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth* (Mk 12:14). Here, the text shows it is manipulation: *But knowing their hypocrisy, he [Jesus] said to them ...* (v.15).

increasing politeness, and it needs to be remembered that Brown and Levinson consider the strategies in Table 2 to be more polite than those in Table 1. Of the two other super strategies, the *bald-on-record* strategy uses no politeness, so therefore is of little interest here. The *off-record* strategy, however, does result in a number of potential practical strategies, which Brown and Levinson devote some space to describing.

**Table 1: Chart of positive politeness strategies<sup>54</sup>**

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>POSITIVE POLITENESS STRATEGY:</b></p> <p>Claim ‘common ground’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convey ‘X is admirable, interesting’:</li> <li>1. Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)</li> <li>2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)</li> <li>3. Intensify interest to H</li> <li>Claim in-group membership with H:</li> <li>4. Use in-group identity markers</li> <li>Claim common point of view, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, empathy</li> <li>5. Seek agreement</li> <li>6. Avoid disagreement</li> <li>7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground</li> <li>8. Joke</li> </ul> <p>Convey that S and H are cooperators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indicate S knows H’s wants and is taking them into account:</li> <li>9. Assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants</li> <li>Claim reflexivity: If H wants, then S wants (H has X); if S wants, then H wants (S has X)</li> <li>10. Offer, promise</li> <li>11. Be optimistic</li> <li>12. Include both S and H in the activity</li> <li>13. Give (or ask for) reasons</li> <li>Claim reciprocity:</li> <li>14. Assume or assert reciprocity</li> </ul> <p>Fulfil H’s want (for some X):</p> <li>15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)</li> |
|---|

### 2.3.2. Critique

As has already been implied, Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness is an influential theory and has been extensively used and tested,<sup>55</sup> often in cross-cultural contexts. Goldsmith indicates three strengths of the theory: first, its ability to explain many aspects of communication; second, its linking of ‘microscopic aspects of language’ with ‘macroscopic variations in social power, distance and culture’, and that language use results from ‘a

<sup>54</sup> Based on Brown and Levinson, 102.

<sup>55</sup> Goldsmith ‘Politeness Theory,’ 227. A journal devoted solely to politeness studies now exists: *Journal of Politeness Research*.

combination of culturally specific and universal processes'; and hence third, its value to study how communicators 'use language to enact identities and relationships over the course of an interaction'.<sup>56</sup>

**Table 2: Chart of negative politeness strategies<sup>57</sup>**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGY:</b>  |  |
| Do the face-threatening action on-record alone:                                       |  |
| Be direct:  | 1. Be conventionally indirect (if there is a clash)                    |
| Do the face-threatening action on-record plus redress H's want to be unimpinged upon: |  |
| Don't presume/assume:   | Make minimal assumptions about H's wants, what is relevant to H:       |
|   | 2. Question, hedge   |
| Don't coerce H (when H is requested to do a face-threatening action):                 |  |
| Give H option not to do act:  |  |
| Be indirect:  | 1. Be conventionally indirect  |
| Don't assume H is able/willing to do the face-threatening action:                     |  |
|   | 2. Question, hedge   |
| Assume H is not likely to do the face-threatening action:                             |  |
|   | 3. Be pessimistic  |
| Minimise threat:  |  |
| Make explicit R, P, D values:   |  |
|   | 4. Minimise the face-threatening action                                |
|   | 5. Give deference  |
| Communicate S's want to not impinge on H:   |  |
|   | 6. Apologize   |
| Dissociate S, H from the particular infringement:                                     |  |
|   | 7. Impersonalise S and H: avoid the pronouns 'I' and 'you'             |
|   | 8. State the face-threatening action as a general rule                 |
|   | 9. Nominalise (i.e. make the statements into noun clauses and phrases) |
| Redress other wants of H's, derivative from negative face:                            |  |
|   | 5. Give deference  |
|   | 10. Go on-record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H            |

Weaknesses of the theory are: it is unable to predict politeness strategies, particularly in the case of social distance between interactants;<sup>58</sup> it is focussed on language production (linguistics) rather than also taking into account other aspects of communication (e.g. body

<sup>56</sup> Goldsmith, 'Politeness Theory,' 232-233.

<sup>57</sup> Based on Brown and Levinson, 131.

<sup>58</sup> See Goldsmith 'Politeness Theory,' 227; Michael J. Cody, Deborah Dunn, 'Accounts', in *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; eds, B.B. Whaley, W.Samter; Mahwah, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007) 244; Roger Brown, Albert Gilman, 'Politeness Theory and Shakespeare's Four Major Tragedies', *Language in Society* 18 (1989) 166, 168.

language, non-verbal communication);<sup>59</sup> it is focussed on requests ('impositions');<sup>60</sup> it is focussed on the speaker-addressee relationship;<sup>61</sup> it is focussed on a single turn in conversations rather than over a stretch of talk;<sup>62</sup> does not deal with written communication;<sup>63</sup> and it is essentially a functionalist theory: that is, it shows expected behaviour and affirms norms in a society, whereas many scholars want to explore how people use communication to create identity.<sup>64</sup> To be fair, Brown and Levinson anticipate a number of these criticisms,<sup>65</sup> and their theory, despite the criticisms, has proved important and useful in communication studies. Another criticism is that 'face' is too limiting a notion to be used as a universal human desire and 'shame' (defined as a threat to the social bond) should be proposed to be the more fundamental desire.<sup>66</sup> However, even if 'shame' lies at the back of all human interaction, it itself is too broad a concept to be used to analyse communication or predict strategies of communication. Some researchers also argue that Brown and Levinson's placing of politeness strategies into a graded scale is not necessarily valid.<sup>67</sup> One example is gift-giving, which Brown and Levinson consider to be the most polite of the positive politeness strategies. Cultural-anthropological studies indicate gift-giving is a form of social control, in which the giver obligates the receiver to him/her.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, gift-giving should not be viewed as a politeness strategy. This seems also the case in the Hebrew Bible. 1 Samuel 30:26-31 and 2 Samuel 2:1-4 in combination suggests David's gifts to the leaders of Judah expedited their acceptance of him as their king; and Proverbs 18:16 and 21:14 recognise the power in giving gifts.

Generally, criticism of Brown and Levinson's theory relates to researchers' awareness that different cultures (and often groups within a culture) place differing value on matters of face,

<sup>59</sup> Most critics; see, e.g. Agha, *Language*, 316, also pp.308, 311; Tracy, 'Discourse,' esp. 22-23; Richard I. Watts, *Politeness* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 85-227 ([www.lib.mylibrary.com](http://www.lib.mylibrary.com)). However, most of Watts' study deals with verbal conversations!

<sup>60</sup> Cody and Dunn, 244; Holtgraves 'Linguistic Realization,' 145-146.

<sup>61</sup> Agha, *Language*, 316.

<sup>62</sup> Holtgraves, 'Linguistic Realization,' 151; Tracy, 'Discourse,' 23-24.

<sup>63</sup> Jon Hall, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero's Letters* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 7.

<sup>64</sup> Hendry, 'To Wrap,' 629-631; Goldsmith, 'Politeness,' 232-233; Lisette Josephides, 'Disengagement and Desire: The Tactics of Everyday Life', *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999) 142.

<sup>65</sup> E.g. Brown and Levinson, 94 (motivation for language use).

<sup>66</sup> T.J. Scheff, 'Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory', *ST* 18 (2000) 93, 96-97.

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g. Brown and Gilman, 180-181, citing various studies.

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g. Michelle Stephen, 'Reparation and the Gift', *Ethos* 28 (2000) 119-121; A. van de Rijt, M.W. Macy, 'Power and Dependence in Intimate exchange', *SF* 84 (2006) 1455-1456; Mark W. Hamilton, 'At Whose Table? Stories of Elites and Social Climbers in 1-2 Samuel', *VT* 59 (2009) 513-532.

These studies rely on the foundational work, M. Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).



that factors such as social and power differences between interactants are more interrelated than Brown and Levinson propose, and that language is used to create identity. This last awareness has become a major focus in linguistic and communication research, but as Tracy indicates, the functionalist emphasis of politeness theory is needed to assist the study of what people do with their talk: when customary patterns of talk have been established, the intention of what a person does with his or her talk (or behaviour) can then be determined.<sup>69</sup>

### 2.3.3. Applicability

A selection of articles and papers since the 1987 publication of *Politeness* indicates the wide scope in which politeness theory has been used, even by those who are critical of the theory or aspects of it. Okamoto, and Bustamante-Lopéz and Niño-Murcia, from studies in two stratified societies (Japan, northern Andes), confirm Brown and Levinson on the matter that the amount of politeness used is dependent on the face-threat, and in accordance with social and power distance.<sup>70</sup> This issue of an appropriate amount of politeness for interactions is highlighted by Cohen et al, who show that in an honour bound society politeness can result in violence.<sup>71</sup> Cohen et al do not use politeness theory, but their study illustrates what happens when politeness is over used: namely, face-threatening actions by a socially inferior speaker to the hearer cannot be adequately expressed, so the society in question has no mechanisms to address the normal daily conflicts of interest that people encounter.

Most research either applies or extends politeness theory to situations not covered by Brown and Levinson. Katz et al apply the theory to responses when gratitude was expressed for a favour done, and confirm Brown and Levinson's contention that the amount of politeness will increase when the cost of a face-threatening action is high. However, social distance and relative power differences had little influence on politeness except when the cost of the favour

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<sup>69</sup> Tracy 'Discourse,' 30-31. This is the approach of Hendry, Josephides and Watts.

<sup>70</sup> Okamoto, 'Politeness' 119-139; I. Bustamante-Lopéz, M. Niño-Murcia, 'Impositive Speech Acts in Northern Andean Spanish: A Pragmatic Description', *Hispania* 78 (1995) 885-897. Hendry 'To Wrap' also notes this: away from the "sophisticated" international groups' in Japan, politeness is a minimal problem in rural areas. That is, in Japan, social distance is expressed mostly in terms of the outsider-insider difference between people, also recognised by Brown and Levinson (*Politeness*, 181).

<sup>71</sup> D. Cohen, J. Vandello, S. Puente, A. Rantilla, "When you call me that, Smile!" How Norms for Politeness, Interaction Styles, and Aggression Work together in Southern Culture', *SPQ* 62 (1999) 257-275. The title of the article shows that Cohen et al study southern USA culture.

was very high.<sup>72</sup> Chiu applies the theory to group problem solving in a context where social distance is nil (high school students in Hong Kong) to affirm that perceptions of status affect the level of politeness used by members of a group to each other.<sup>73</sup> In line with Brown and Levinson, if a person was perceived to be 'high status', they used little politeness to the other members in the group, and became influential in the group. Agha, despite his criticism of politeness theory, in effect applies it to the situation when a speaker refers to someone else other than the addressee.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Watts extends politeness theory into social interaction, claiming on one hand that people recognise impolite behaviour, but such behaviour is context dependent rather than due to the breaking of commonly agreed patterns of politeness. ultimately he argues that politeness/impoliteness is a form of power: it is designed to control an interaction or situation.<sup>75</sup> Ardila applies the theory in an openly cross-cultural context: turn-taking in media broadcast panel discussions in Spain and Great Britain.<sup>76</sup> One value of Ardila's study is that it shows the cultural weighting given to something as simple as taking turns in a conversation. But the study also, by virtue of its focus, effectively counters the criticism that politeness theory is inapplicable to an extended discourse or dialogue. Holtgraves applies politeness theory to self-disclosure, as well as to disagreements by speakers.<sup>77</sup> Josephides in a similar vein to Holtgraves applies the theory to how young women of the Kewa tribe in Papua New Guinea express their desire for change.<sup>78</sup> Both studies show how politeness is customarily used as well as how speakers modify it when change is being argued for. That is, they study how politeness (or a lack of it) relates to identity construction. Josephides' study also has importance because she applies politeness theory to non-verbal signs (e.g. fashion, activities) and identity construction.

Of particular interest is the use of politeness theory to literary texts of past ages. Brown and Gilman apply the theory to four Shakespeare plays to indicate when the politeness strategies that are listed in Tables 1 and 2 occur, and offer explanations when they unexpectedly do not

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<sup>72</sup> A.N. Katz, M. Lenhardt, K. Mitchell, 'On Acknowledging Thanks for Performing a Favour', *MS* 22 (2007) 233-250. The study was done on young men and women at a university.

<sup>73</sup> M.M. Chiu, 'Effects of Status on Solutions, Leadership, and Evaluations During Group Problem Solving', *SE* 73 (2000) 175-195.

<sup>74</sup> Agha, *Language*, 301-332. Brown and Levinson, 180-182 discuss this issue briefly.

<sup>75</sup> Watts, *Politeness*, 117-263.

<sup>76</sup> J.A.G. Ardila, 'Transition Relevance Places and Overlapping in (Spanish-English) Conversational Etiquette', *MLR* 99 (2004) 635-650.

<sup>77</sup> Holtgraves, 'Linguistic Realization,' 149-150, 147-149.

<sup>78</sup> Josephides, 'Disengagement,' 139-159.

occur (e.g. anger).<sup>79</sup> Despite some modifications, they show politeness theory is applicable to a literary work. Paternoster discusses politeness in *Libro Del Cortegiano*, an early sixteenth century work by the Italian writer, Castiglione. As with Cohen et al, Paternoster does not use politeness theory explicitly, but he shows how polite speech is used in identity construction: in the second edition of *Libro*, socially inferior characters use polite speech to socially superior characters, despite their disobedience to the latter because of their loyalty to their peers.<sup>80</sup> Both Brown and Gilman, and Paternoster, affirm Brown and Levinson's contention that people will use politeness to honour face, unless other concerns override that need. But both articles also indicate the difficulty that politeness theory has in predicting patterns of politeness: there are more factors to consider than just social distance, power relationships and how a given culture views a face-threatening action. Even Brown and Levinson recognise that in some sectors of Western society, *bald on-record* interactions are the ideal rather than polite language.<sup>81</sup> Lloyd discusses a selection of texts from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to determine the off-record strategies in those texts, to argue, against other scholars, that Homer could write subtly and with great effect.<sup>82</sup> Hall discusses politeness in the context of politics in Cicero's letters, though he passes over positive and negative politeness categories in favour of Roman terms,<sup>83</sup> and Sallaberger discusses politeness in Old Babylonian period letters.<sup>84</sup>

The range of cultures (Japanese, tribal, highland Andean, French, Spanish, Western, Greek<sup>85</sup>), contexts (group work, stratified society, formal debate) and topics (object reference, self-disclosure, cultural change, gratitude, disagreement) covered by the studies reviewed above indicates the applicability of politeness theory (or at least some aspects of it) to analyse spoken human interaction, despite scholars' critiques about 'face' being understood in the

<sup>79</sup> Brown and Gilman, 159-212.

<sup>80</sup> Annick Paternoster, 'Decorum and Indecorum in the Seconda Redazione of Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro Del Cortegiano*', *MLR* 99 (2004) 626.

<sup>81</sup> Brown and Levinson, 250-251. Tracy, 'Discourse and Identity,' 28-29 indicates that bald on record communication is preferred by middleclass white American men, by Malagasy women, and by both men and women in Israeli society. See also Ardila, 'Transition,' 639-640 on the matter of pauses and turn taking in conversations.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Lloyd, 'The Politeness of Achilles: Off-Record Conversation Strategies in Homer and the Meaning of "Kertomia"', *JHS* 124 (2004) 75-89.

<sup>83</sup> Hall, *Politeness and Politics*. See also Jon Hall, 'Cicero Fam. 5.8 and Fam. 15.5 in the Light of Modern Politeness Theory,' *Antichthon* 30 (1996) 19-33. Hall also gives a list of others who have applied politeness theory to the Greek and Roman worlds (p.213, fn.21).

<sup>84</sup> Walther Sallaberger, 'Wenn Du Mein Bruder bist, ...' *Interaktion und Textgestaltung in altbabylonischen Alltagsbriefen* (Cuneiform Monographs 16; Groningen: Styx Publications, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> M. Sifianou, *Politeness Phenomena in England and Greece: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Oxford, 1992), and E. Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address* (Oxford, 1996) 30-42, cited in Lloyd, 'Achilles,' 75, fn.2.

same way in all cultures, and Brown and Levinson's 'formula' to measure face-threat. If there is a trend in criticism of the theory, it is that researchers wish to study all aspects of communication, and focus particularly on power relationships; that is, how people construct their identities by using politeness or a lack of it.<sup>86</sup>

#### **2.3.4. Applicability to the Hebrew Bible**

The implication from the studies by Paternoster, Brown and Gilmore, and especially Lloyd, is that politeness theory can be applied to the Bible. One feature of the theory that is attractive for use on biblical texts is its focus on language production; that is, verbal signs. Biblical narratives tend to be terse and rarely record non-verbal signs or the emotional state of characters. Prayers, songs and prophetic discourses are separated from their performance contexts. A second feature that is attractive is the theory's focus on impositions (requests). Most uses of deference in biblical texts are in connection with requests. Furthermore, as Lloyd indicates, 'Literary dialogue has the advantage of being completely transparent in terms of context. All relevant factors are in principle available for anyone to test.'<sup>87</sup> However, as Brown and Gilman point out, 'Data sets are often critically incomplete; analyses cannot be fully objective.'<sup>88</sup> For the Bible, the incompleteness of data comes from historical distance – conventions of speaking and standards of behaviour are not fully articulated, and may not even be shared by speakers and hearers in the text. In addition, the biblical texts are literary texts, whereas politeness theory is a theory built on spoken interactions.<sup>89</sup> However, neither stops politeness theory being useful for study of the Bible and for other literary works, present and past.

Politeness theory has yet to become familiar to biblical scholars (as well as to scholars of antiquity), despite a long-standing awareness that many characters in biblical narrative use

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<sup>86</sup> However, this topic has been, and presently is being, addressed by a number of researchers; see, e.g. Josephides, 'Disengagement,' 139-159 (as noted); Tracy, 'Discourse,' 23-31; Chiu, 'Effects,' 175-195; and A. Lodge, 'Colloquial Vocabulary and Politeness in French', *MLR* 94 (1999) 355-365 (in the context of French colloquial language); Hendry, 'To Wrap,' 621, 623, 629 (in the context of Japanese politeness protocols). Goldsmith, 'Politeness,' 232-233 thinks identity construction is the most useful topic to which to apply politeness theory.

<sup>87</sup> Lloyd, 'Achilles,' 75.

<sup>88</sup> Brown and Gilman, 208.

<sup>89</sup> C.f. Hall, *Politeness and Politics*, 7.

respectful language.<sup>90</sup> The only published large scale application of the theory I have found to date is Revell's application to deferential speech by the characters in the Books of Judges – 2 Kings.<sup>91</sup> The theory allows Revell to recognise not just deference (Table 2, strategy #5) in a speech, but also the politeness strategies of 'impersonalise' and 'nominalise' (Table 2, strategies #7, 9). He further classifies deferential language on the basis of threat to negative face and positive face to the speaker and also to the hearer. An observation on the specific use of deferential (master-slave) language is: 'The choice of designation [i.e. a name, descriptive term, or pronoun] is determined by the desired or expected perlocutionary effect, by what the speaker intends, expects or fears will be the effect of his speech on the addressee.'<sup>92</sup> A second observation is that speakers who are subordinate to the addressee in the Judg-2 Kgs narratives use deferential language 'to persuade a status-marked addressee to act as he wishes, to accept criticism without taking offence, and so on.' A third is: a speaker not in such relationships can assume the 'position [of 'servant'] metaphorically for purposes of ingratiating himself with the master, or persuading him to a particular course of action'.<sup>93</sup> This last situation occurs rarely in Judg-2 Kgs, but Abigail's speech to David in 1 Sam 25:23-35 is a good example. Here, Abigail, who is higher 'status' than David (who is an outlaw), designates herself as אִמָּהָ and שִׁפְחָהּ and David as אֲדֹנָי to persuade David not to massacre her household in revenge for her husband's slight to him. Her persuasion is successful (see Chapter 6.2).

On the basis of these observations, Revell determines that non-deferential language is used for characters in only two types of situations when deference is normally expected: when they express strong emotion (i.e. there is a concern that overrides the need to honour face), and when a character has a formal relationship with the addressee (i.e. social distance D is low). The latter situation is exemplified by Joab in 2 Sam 12:27-28, who, in this text, is simply following his king's orders. In conjunction with other linguistic theory, Revell understands the former situation to be examples of 'marking' in the text; that is, the narrator creates a

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<sup>90</sup> E.g., Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSS 70; BLS 17; trans. D. Shefer-Vanson; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989) 66-67, who notes that master-slave deference is polite speech and appropriate to a range of inferiors to the hearers in biblical narrative. See also Chapters 6.2.2.4 and 7.2.2.2 where recognition of Abigail and Judah's polite speeches in 1 Sam 25:23-31 and Gen 44:18-33 respectively is cited.

<sup>91</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 267-274.

<sup>92</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 312.

<sup>93</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 50, 37. C.f. Vawter's comment for Jacob and Esau's interaction in Gen 33:17: 'Esau willingly accepts the role of beneficent lord in which Jacob has willingly cast him' (B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1977] 353). Revell's comments are in line with Brown and Levinson's argument that the setting and context of the interaction will determine the politeness forms used (*Politeness*, 182).

stress or emphasis that the audience is to note as important.<sup>94</sup> In effect, Revell's observations and discussion show that identity construction occurs with the use of polite language in biblical narrative.

In addition to Revell's published work, politeness theory has been used occasionally in PhD dissertations. Johnson uses politeness theory in conjunction with speech-act theory and studies into turn-taking in conversations/dialogue to analyse the dialogues in the Book of Ruth.<sup>95</sup> His approach is to identify politeness strategies in the dialogues,<sup>96</sup> which are then used as data for his speech-act and sociological analysis of the dialogues. Johnson also shows how politeness theory builds on both Grice's work and anthropologists' understanding of 'face', thus proving that Brown and Levinson's concept of positive and negative face is valid.<sup>97</sup> However, he is uncritical in his use of politeness theory, and the amount of space devoted to discussing his methodologies makes his dissertation more a defence of his methodologies than a work that focuses on interpreting the biblical text. Master-slave deference is also rarely dealt with.

Bryan Estelle uses politeness theory in a discussion of deference in Aramaic literature, including the Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible (Ezra, Daniel), along with the Book of Esther. His specific focus is grammatical: third person references, prepositions and passives as politeness strategies.<sup>98</sup> In contrast to Johnson, his review of politeness theory is more extensive and includes a critique of the theory.<sup>99</sup> However, a fault in his dissertation is his confusing the strategy, 'impersonalise' with 'deference' in his language of 'third-person deference'. Estelle, like Johnson, also does not deal with master-slave deference in depth.

Despite this research by Revell, Johnson and Estelle, there has been a paucity of publications in biblical studies that use politeness theory. Neither Revell, except for *Designation*, nor

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<sup>94</sup> Revell, *Designation*, 272-274. C.f. Tracy, 'Discourse,' 25: 'Marking ... is a way speakers convey that the taken for granted identities expected for a specific interactional one ... do not apply.'

<sup>95</sup> Robert M. Johnson, *The Words in their Mouths: A Linguistic and Literary Analysis of the Dialogues in the Book of Ruth* (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1993). I wish to record my thanks to David Kummerow of Dalby, Queensland, who drew my attention to this work.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, *Words*, 130-157.

<sup>97</sup> Johnson, *Words*, 105-114.

<sup>98</sup> Bryan D. Estelle, *Know Before Whom You Stand: The language of Deference in Some Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Documents* (PhD diss., Catholic University of America; Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 2001). I wish to record my thanks to David Kummerow of Dalby, Queensland, who drew my attention to this work.

<sup>99</sup> Estelle, *Know*, 14-33.

Johnson has used politeness theory in their publications. Estelle has published only one article that I know of using politeness theory, focusing on an aspect of his thesis.<sup>100</sup> Warren-Rothlin critiques politeness theory, but shows in a similar fashion to Estelle that certain forms of Hebrew grammar reveal politeness forms.<sup>101</sup> Thus my comment that politeness theory has yet to become familiar to biblical scholars. On the positive side, three articles use politeness theory in a minor way in their discussion of the role of the particle *na*.<sup>102</sup> A more extensive application of politeness theory occurs in combination with honour-shame dynamics in a published essay by Johan Coetzee on ‘enemy psalms’.<sup>103</sup> Most recently, an article by Thomas has been published on the Arad, Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Lachish letters, in which he uses politeness as the key analysis tool to argue that the formulae in these letters’ prescripts are determined by the social relationship between sender and addressee as well as the context of writing.<sup>104</sup> This agrees with my argument in Chapter 5.3 for the Lachish letters, despite Thomas’ lesser attention to the bodies of the letters than in my study. It is hoped that Thomas and Estelle’s articles and my two articles which form Chapter 5 of this dissertation will bring to greater prominence politeness theory in biblical studies.

Generally, when politeness theory is applied to biblical texts, strategies of politeness within a text are usually elucidated, then sociological observations made or analysis performed on what is found. Across the Hebrew Bible, politeness strategies as defined by Brown and Levinson are clearly present. For example, in-group identity markers (Table 1, strategy #4)

<sup>100</sup> This was determined by a search in the ATLA religion database for publications by Revell, Johnson and Estelle, and citations in recent publications. Estelle’s article is: Bryan Estelle, ‘The Use of Deferential Language in the Arsames Correspondence and Biblical Aramaic Compared’, *Maarav* 13:1 (2006) 43-76. *Maarav* is not indexed in ATLA.

<sup>101</sup> Andy L. Warren-Rothlin, ‘Politeness Strategies in Biblical Hebrew and West African Languages’, *JT* 3:1 (2007) 55-56: *Qātal* and long-form *yiqṭōl* reflects politeness. They correlate with the relative social standing with interactants in a communication event (pp. 66-68).

<sup>102</sup> Ahouva Shulman, ‘The Particle *na* in Biblical Hebrew Prose’, *HS* 40 (1990) 57-82; Timothy Wilt, ‘A Sociolinguistic Analysis of *na*’, *VT* 46 (1996) 237-255; Bent Christiansen, ‘A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Particle *nā*: A Test Case’, *VT* 59 (2009) 379-393. Their argument is that *na* does not represent ‘logical consequence’ (so T.O. Lambdin, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* [New York: Schribner, 1971] 170, and accepted by B.K. Waltke, M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990] §34.7) nor simply urgency (e.g. Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992] §41.1; 54). Wilt and Shulman between them present a mass of evidence from Genesis-2 Kings to prove their point.

<sup>103</sup> Johan H. Coetzee, ‘Politeness Strategies in the So-called “Enemy Psalms”’: An Inquiry into Israelite Prayer Rhetoric’, in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (JSOTSS 195; eds, S.E. Porter, D.L. Stamps; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 209-236. Coetzee, however, seems to focus mostly on ‘body’ imagery in Psalms in his other publications, of which most are confined to South Africa. I am indebted to David Kummerow of Dalby, Queensland, for drawing my attention to this essay.

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Thomas, ‘The Language of Politeness in Ancient Hebrew Letters’, *HS* 50 (2009) 17-39.

are prominent, usually of a familial nature.<sup>105</sup> Two examples are David's use of 'son' for himself in 1 Sam 25:8 when he makes a substantial request to Nabal, and exchange of 'brother' by the kings of Israel and Aram before formalising a treaty (1 Kgs 20:32-33). The use of 'offer/give reasons' (Table 1, strategy #13) is frequent in requests in biblical narrative, which is shown in Chapters 6 and 7.

Some examples of strategies in Table 2 present in the Hebrew Bible are: requests that use the clause, *if I have found favour* (#2 – question, hedge; Gen 33:10; 47:29); Laban's use of *if you will allow me to say so*, (Gen 30:27) to encourage Jacob to continue to work for him (also #2); the introduction to Judah's plea to Joseph in Gen 44:18 (#6 – apologise: *do not be angry with your servant*); and Barzillai's language to David in 2 Sam 19:34-37 in his refusal to accept an invitation to live at court (#7 – impersonalise S and H: David is consistently called אדני המלך ['my lord the king'], or just המלך ['the king']). Because deference (strategy #5) occurs frequently in the Bible, usually in the form of עבדך and אדני, it will be the main politeness strategy that will be studied. This is done in Chapters 6-7. Of the examples just cited, deference appears in Gen 44:18; 1 Sam 25:8 and 2 Sam 19:34-37.

My use of politeness theory to study biblical texts achieves a number of objectives. One is to show that biblical texts, especially characters' speaking in narrative and prayer, is amenable to analysis by politeness theory. A second is to show that a number of the strategies listed in Tables 1 and 2 are used by characters in biblical narrative. This has the effect of showing that master-slave deference is just one strategy of politeness among many. A third is to determine patterns in the use of politeness strategies. For example, as discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, when the strategy, 'give reasons' is used by characters in biblical narrative, deference tends to decrease. In Genesis, master-slave deference usually opens a speech. In some cases it also closes it, thus forming a frame for the speaking (Chapter 7). A fourth is what Revell engages in: to determine how characters construct an identity in their communication in order to achieve what they want. Texts in Chapters 6 and 7 were chosen deliberately to highlight this purpose for polite speech. The same occurs in the Lachish Letters (see Chapter 5.2). Even the use of עבד for self-deference in Psalms indicates that the 'voice' in those psalms constructs an identity of loyalty to God to assist with requests for God's help and favour (see Chapter

<sup>105</sup> This is also the case in the Arad letters. See Thomas, 'Language,' 26-29.



8.2.1). In effect, I will show that the setting and content(s) of the interaction determine the politeness forms used, even though like for all languages, biblical Hebrew uses ‘generalized forms of address for strangers, unfamiliar, etc.’<sup>106</sup> As indicated in Chapter 5.3, scholarship on language use in the ancient Near East has yet to consider seriously context and content of texts in its discussions.<sup>107</sup> The importance of setting and content of interaction for politeness matches metaphor theory’s contention that context determines the choice of metaphor used. Slave terms, being part of a generalised form of address, allow both theories to be used together.

## **2.4. NARRATIVE THEORY**

### **2.4.1. Description**

Since the metaphorical use of slave terms frequently occurs in narrative, especially as deference, narrative theory is apropos to assist with interpreting those narrative texts in which the language occurs. Essentially, narrative theory attempts to describe how a story is put together. It looks at the role of the narrator (intrusive, unintrusive, reliable, or unreliable), purpose of characterisation, style of the narrative (e.g., episodic, flowing, gaps, explanatory comments, repetition), symbolism, tone of the narrative (e.g., irony), and narrative time. Characterisation includes how characters are introduced; whether they are flat, stock or developed; and whether they generate empathy, sympathy or antipathy. Plot includes drama, conflict, tension and resolution; sequencing of events (including anticipation and retrospection); spatial settings (which may be symbolic); importance of events and objects; and causality.<sup>108</sup>

Narrative theorists obviously differ amongst themselves in how they articulate each element of a narrative and how important it is in determining the point or thrust of the narrative. For example, Alter, when dealing with characterisation, argues that the narrator’s statements

<sup>106</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 182.

<sup>107</sup> Even Thomas, ‘Language,’ does not do this, except to correlate prescripts of ancient Hebrew letters with possible relative statuses, something already done without the help of politeness theory. An exception is Ellen F. Morris, ‘Bowing and Scraping in the Ancient Near East: An Investigation into Obsequiousness in the Amarna Letters’, *JNES* 65 (2006) 179-195, who argues that variation in effusiveness by vassals to Egypt in the Amarna letters is correlated to region, and explains it as a result of regional variation in relationship with Egypt.

<sup>108</sup> This brief overview is based on Mark A. Powell, *What is narrative criticism?* (Guides to biblical scholarship; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: a study in literary design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*; Janice C. Anderson, *Matthew’s Narrative Web: Over and Over again* (JSNTSS 91; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994).

about a character are the most reliable clue to determining what a character is like. The character's own speech, and comments by other characters are less reliable as a guide, and their actions, appearance, gestures, posture and costume are the least reliable as a guide to their character.<sup>109</sup> Bar-Efrat prefers to put these aspects of characterisation in two categories: direct characterisation (narrator's statements, comments by other characters, self-talk/thoughts); and indirect characterisation (style of speech, social standing revealed in speech, answers to superiors, response to others).<sup>110</sup> However, Bar-Efrat's focus on social standing, answers and responses of characters is immediately applicable to studies of the use of slave terms in deference.

Because the Hebrew Bible is a compendium of texts, with self-contained narratives also within larger narratives (e.g. the Joseph story in Genesis, David and Abigail in 1 Sam 25, the 'succession narrative' of 2 Sam 11-20), narrative theory can be expanded to consider elements that re-occur across the corpus, such as settings that are typical to a topic ('type scenes'; e.g. man meets woman at a well; God/angel speaks to a woman to announce she will give birth), the conventionality of introductions to characters and narrative units and variation from these (e.g. in 1 Sam 25:2, the usual word order changes to emphasise Nabal's wealth).<sup>111</sup> This also raises the issue of intertextuality; that is, material or ideas in one text is used in another to portray, for example, a character as similar to someone in the first text. This is frequently done for David in 1 Samuel, and is noted in Chapter 6.2.1.

#### 2.4.2. Critique

Narrative theory is critiqued for remaining in the world of the text rather than crossing into the world of the reader. That is, while it can assist with determining the point of view of the text (in literary terms, the *implied author* and *implied reader*), it does not take into consideration that the biblical texts are now separated from their authors/compiler and original contexts and readers/hearers, and that contemporaries of the authors/compiler may have also interpreted the texts in varied ways. This then permits varied interpretations of a

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<sup>109</sup> Robert Alter, 'Character in the Bible', *Commentary* 66:4 (1978) 59, incorporated into *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), chapter 1.

<sup>110</sup> Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 53-88.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Alter, 'Biblical Type Scenes and the Uses of Convention', *CE* 5 (1978) 58-65; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 124.

narrative's point of view that may be different from the author/compiler's intention and meaning, a matter that reader-response criticism addresses.<sup>112</sup> Bakhtin's approach for analysing novels, frequently used by biblical scholars,<sup>113</sup> fits with reader-response criticism, with his emphasis on how novels interact with readers, reflect the society in which they were written, reveal the values of the author, identification of suppressed voices in the text, and so on. But both Bakhtin's approach and narrative theory in general can be critiqued for applying a theory based on the interpretation of novels to material that cannot be designated as *novel*, despite what some biblical scholarship may claim for certain biblical texts. That is, the *genre* of biblical writing is problematic for narrative theory. A third critique of narrative theory (and Bakhtin) is the issue of culture, a matter raised in relation to politeness theory. For example, what may be carnivalesque in Bakhtin's methodology and to a present day reader<sup>114</sup> may not be carnivalesque to an ancient Israelite author and his/her readers. What elements that make a good story for a present day reader may not be elements ancient story-tellers used.

### 2.4.3. Applicability to the Hebrew Bible

Obviously, narrative theory is applicable to analysing biblical texts, given the popularity of Bakhtin's methodology and the wide reception of Alter and Bar-Efrat's approaches. Both

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<sup>112</sup> For summaries, see eg. R. Beach, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993); S.R. Suleiman, 'Introduction: Varieties of Audience-oriented Criticism', *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (eds, S.R. Suleiman, I. Crosman; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980; J.P. Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1980). For summaries of how reader-response criticism is used in biblical interpretation, see, e.g. E.V. McKnight, *Post-modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988) and his briefer summary in E.V. McKnight, 'Reader-response criticism', in *To each his own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Applications* (eds, S. Hayes, S. MacKenzie; Louisville: Westminster, John Knox, 1993) 197-219. See also M. Gerhard, 'The Restoration of Biblical Narrative', *Semeia* 46 (1989) 13-29; and R. Detweiler, 'What is a sacred text', *Semeia* 31 (1985) 213-230.

<sup>113</sup> Bakhtin's methodology informs, for example, Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (HBM 19; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), and Barbara Green, *How are the Mighty Fallen? A Dialogical Study of King Saul in 1 Samuel* (JSOTSS 365; Sheffield Academic Press, 2005). Recent articles that apply various aspects of Bakhtin's methodology to the Hebrew Bible are: Paul S. Evans, 'The Hezekiah-Sennacherib Narrative as Polyphonic Text', *JSOT* 33 (2009) 335-358; Sung Uk Lin, 'Jonah's Transformation and Transformation of Jonah from the Bakhtinian Perspective of Authoring and Re-authoring', *JSOT* 33 (2008) 245-256; Christopher B. Hays, 'The Silence of the Wives: Bakhtin's Monologism and Ezra 7-10', *JSOT* 33 (2008) 59-80; and William R. Millar, 'A Bakhtinian Reading of Narrative Space and its Relationship to Social Space', in *Constructions of Space I: Theory, Geography, and Narrative* (LHB 481; eds, J.L. Berquist, C.V. Camp; New York: T&T Clark, 2007) 129-140. See also the articles in *The Bible and Critical Theory* 3 (2007) and in *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 29:1 (2007); and the papers in Roland Boer (ed.), *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Studies, 2007). The Society for Biblical Literature has a section devoted to the use of Bakhtin's methodology in biblical studies, *Bakhtin and the Biblical Imagination*.

<sup>114</sup> Nehema Aschkenasy, 'Reading Ruth through a Bakhtinian Lens: The Carnavalesque in a Biblical Tale', *JBL* 126 (2007) 437-453.

Alter and Bar-Efrat developed their methods from a close reading of the Hebrew Bible, as has also Sternberg.<sup>115</sup> The standard elements of plot such as setting, problem, dramatic tension, and resolution can be discerned in many individual narrative texts as well as in a much wider narrative. For example, in Gen 27, when Jacob steals the blessing due to the elder son, the setting is: Isaac is old and so wants to give the blessing. The problem is: he wants to give it to Esau, though Gen 25:19-29 indicates Jacob will be pre-eminent over Esau, and Esau has already given his birthright to Jacob. The dramatic tension is: will Jacob get caught? This is drawn out considerably in this brief narrative. The resolution is: Jacob gets the blessing.<sup>116</sup> In 1 Sam 8 – 2 Sam 5, the setting is: Israel's request for a king. The problem is: God's displeasure with Saul's kingship. Dramatic tension occurs when David is secretly anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam 16), becomes Saul's musician, then a successful warrior (1 Sam 17), then Saul's son-in-law (1 Sam 18), along with the developing theme of Saul's paranoia over him (starts in 1 Sam 18:6-9). Further tension occurs with David's flight from the court, evading of Saul, refusal to kill Saul when given the chance, and eventual self-exile in Philistia. Resolution starts with Saul's death in 1 Sam 31, but seven years in narrative time elapses before David is finally king of all Israel (2 Sam 5). As is discussed in Chapter 6.2, this narrative is frequently counter-read, using Bakhtinian and other approaches, to argue that David engineered his ascent to the throne.

Large scale applications of explicit narrative theory to biblical texts are provided by Fokkelman, Alter, Bodner, Green, Tsumura and Waltke. Fokkelman is the most detailed, writing four commentaries on the Samuel narratives, covering plot, characterisation, intertextuality, conventional motifs, macro- and micro-structure and so on.<sup>117</sup> At a lesser scale are Bodner and Green, who both write from a Bakhtinian perspective on 1 Samuel.<sup>118</sup> Alter translates the Hebrew Bible and provides commentary from a narrative perspective.<sup>119</sup> Tsumura and Waltke

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<sup>115</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

<sup>116</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994) 208-209; John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendricksen, 2000) 249.

<sup>117</sup> Fokkelman, J.P., *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 1: King David* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981); *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 2: The Crossing Fates* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986); *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 3: Throne and City* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990); *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 4: Vow and Desire* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993).

<sup>118</sup> Bodner, *1 Samuel*; Green, *How have the Mighty Fallen?*

<sup>119</sup> My study uses Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1999); *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996);

provide traditional format commentaries, but with narrative theory analysis guiding their comment.<sup>120</sup>

In my analysis of the use of slave terms in deference, I will be focusing especially on characterisation, especially characterisation through speech, as it is through speech that the deferential use of slave terms occurs. Three aspects that are most relevant are a character's own speech, speech about another character, and a character's inward speech. Alter argues that a character's self-talk gives 'relative certainty' (that is, 'an expression of the narrator's view',<sup>121</sup> about intentions (see, e.g. Gen 32:21[20]; 1 Sam 25:21-22) but motivation may still be hidden; and that speech by a character and speech about a character may only reflect an occasion rather than personal feelings about it. The most reliable clue to a character is the narrator's statements (e.g. the description of Nabal as קשה ורע מעללים and Abigail as טובת־שכל in 1 Sam 25:3).<sup>122</sup> Bar-Efrat's focus on the importance of the style of speaking as forming part of the characterisation (e.g. figurative language, deference or lack of it, and familial language<sup>123</sup>) is also useful, as this assists the identity that the narrator creates for a character. Along with this, the narrator's comments about a character will also be used in my analysis. Such comments can be in the form of direct comment (e.g. 2 Sam 11:27; Gen 6:5); a verb or adjective placed in the usual 'scenic mode' of storytelling (e.g. 2 Sam 20:16; Gen 16:6; Judg 8:33); or placed in the mouth of a character (Judge 20:6; 2 Sam 13:13).<sup>124</sup> My focus on characters and especially their speaking marries with my use of metaphor and politeness theory to assist how the use of slave term deference assists the purpose of speaking and what identity is being constructed by the character. Narrative theory also allows that identity construction to be related to the portrayal of the character by the narrator.

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and *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007). Alter has also, at the time of writing, translated and commented on the Pentateuch.

<sup>120</sup> David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 46-65; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 31-43.

<sup>121</sup> Stephen Llewelyn, personal communication, 03 Feb 2010.

<sup>122</sup> Alter, 'Character,' 59; also Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 31; accepted by Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 14. See also Yairah Amit, "'The Glory of Israel does not Deceive or Change His Mind": On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative', *Prooftexts* 12 (1992) 201-212.

<sup>123</sup> Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 66-72.

<sup>124</sup> Wenham, *Story*, 14.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SLAVERY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND WHAT ASSOCIATIONS ARE EVOKED IN THE METAPHORICAL USE OF SLAVE TERMS**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Now that the method of analysis has been described, attention can be turned onto the metaphoric use of slave terms proper. This chapter focuses on the application of metaphor theory, and in combination with Chapter 4, covers the four aims outlined in Chapter 2.2.3. Politeness theory is tested in Chapter 5, and the two methods applied together from Chapter 6 onwards.

An analysis of metaphorical meanings requires knowledge of what associations are evoked in the metaphor. This chapter therefore starts with a brief overview of the biblical portrayal of slavery to determine possible associations from the social institution that the non-literal use of slave terms might draw upon. A selection of types of metaphorical uses of slave terms is then discussed, to ascertain what associations with slavery are being mapped to these relationships. The latter gives the technical discussion and thus the rationale for the complete listing of all literal and metaphoric uses of עבד, אמה and שפחה given in Chapter 4.

The major part of this chapter, Section 3.2, has been submitted for publication in *Melbourne Historical Journal*, with the bibliography removed. As is the nature of a journal article, a brief review of metaphor theory is given, which repeats Chapter 2.2, and some topics of interest along with comments that anticipate later chapters have had to be omitted. These are dealt with in Section 3.3. The article also, by referencing to ancient Near Eastern literature, indicates that the metaphorical uses of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible are lexicalised (i.e. the ancient Israelites were in keeping with the wider ancient Near East), and sets out how I apply Ritchie's language of 'associations' in this study.

### 3.2. THE METAPHORIC USE OF SLAVE TERMS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

(Submitted for publication as Edward J. Bridge, 'The Metaphoric Use of Slave Terms in the Hebrew Bible', *Melbourne Historical Journal*)

#### **Abstract**

An analysis of metaphoric uses of slavery terms in the Hebrew Bible using metaphor theory reveals a culture of hierarchical relationships based on power and status. Associations (or connotations) from slavery that are called up in such uses are 'possession' (with the derived association, 'control'), 'inferior status', 'work', 'debt/poverty', 'oppression', and 'propensity to run away'. Of six key categories of metaphoric use, subjects and officials to the king, vassalship, personal servants, people in relation to God, and deference, 'inferior status' is the association that is called up in all contexts, hence showing a culture of power and status difference.

#### **Introduction**

This study seeks to fill in a gap in research on the use of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible; specifically in how they are used when they are not designating slaves. For the purposes of this study, I will call this a metaphorical use of slave terms. The gap that needs addressing is how slave terms *work* when they are used metaphorically. Generally, studies on slave terms stay at the philological level; that is, the various uses of the terms are delineated, including metaphorical,<sup>1</sup> but nothing is said as to how the metaphorical uses relate to the literal.

Addressing how slave terms work when they are used metaphorically will reveal an aspect of ancient Israelite culture: how ancient Israelites viewed themselves in relation to others and to God. It will be shown that the use of slave terms in deference and in titles reflects a culture of hierarchical relationships based on power and status.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. J.P.M. van der Ploeg, 'Slavery in the Old Testament', in *Congress Volume, Uppsala, 1971* (SVT 22; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 72-87; H. Ringgren, H. Simian-Yofre, U. Rüterwörden, 'עֶבֶד *‘abad*; עֶבֶד *‘ebed*; עֲבָדָה *‘abôdâ*', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry, trans. D.W. Stott (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: 1992, Vol. 10), 383-387, 390-398.



The use of slave terms in deference and for titles is common across the ancient Near East and well antedates the Bible. Slave terms in a loyalty formula, *I am your stalwart servant*, appears a letter dated to 2215-193 BCE (Sumer, late Sargonic period) and in deference in letters as early as 2090-40 BCE (Ur III).<sup>2</sup> The practice continues in the mid-to-late second millennium BCE in Hittite, Ugaritic, Amarna and Egyptian correspondence,<sup>3</sup> and into the biblical period and afterwards, evidenced in the Lachish ostraca, Arad 40, the Mešad Ḥashavyahu plea, neo-Assyrian correspondence, and the Aramaic Elephantine papyri (Cowley 30, 37, 38).<sup>4</sup> The use of slave terms in titles, in relation to both humans and deity, also antedates biblical texts, found in seal inscriptions from the Ur III period onwards, and in tomb inscriptions of the Amarna period in Egypt. This practice also continues into the biblical period.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, the Bible is not unique in this use of slave terms. If anything, such use of slave terms is conventional, to the point that ancient Israelites did not really think about the meaning of the terms. In deference, *'dny* ('my lord') and *'bdk* ('your servant') and their ancient Near Eastern equivalents simply replace the second and third person respectively as polite terms. In titles, *'bd* takes the meaning 'servant', a wide appellation that includes designating personal attendants, officials, prophets, and temple staff.<sup>6</sup> In the terminology of Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive theory of metaphor, *'bd* and *'dwn* ('master/lord') may be dead metaphors.

<sup>2</sup> Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia* (SBLWAW 3; Atlanta, 1993), §§ 96, 30, 24-25. The terms are *arad-zu* (your slave/servant) and *lugal-mu*, 'my lord/king', or *'be-lí*, 'my master/lord'.

<sup>3</sup> For texts, see Harry A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (SBLWAW 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); F. Brent Knutson, 'Literary genres in PRU IV', in *Ras Shamra Parallels* (AnOr 50; 2 vols; ed., L.R. Fisher; Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975, vol. 2), 153-214; William L. Moran, ed., trans., *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Edward Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (SBLWAW1; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990). Wente, p. 10 notes that the Egyptians used master-slave deference less frequently than other societies. It is replaced by elaborate titles and prayer greetings.

<sup>4</sup> For texts, see e.g. F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J.J.M. Roberts, C.L. Seow, R.E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005); H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 254 (six Assyrian letters to the king); B. Porten, ed. and trans., *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans on Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translations* (Jerusalem, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> For examples, see Michalowski; W.W. Hallo, 'Seal Inscriptions', in *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection*, ed. B. Buchanan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 445, 455-462; William J. Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt* (SBLWAW 5; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995); and Dobbs-Allsopp et al.

<sup>6</sup> C.f. the use of *'bdk* in Psalms: Edward J. Bridge, 'Loyalty, Dependency and Status with YHWH: the use of *'bd* in the Psalms', *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009): 360-378; Curt Lindhagen, *The Servant Motif in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Lundquistska Bokhandeln, 1950), 262-275. See also standard references such as Ringgren et al, pp. 376-405.

However, I wish to argue that the ancient Israelites did not lose sight of the metaphoricity of the terms, even in these conventional usages. It is like the present day metaphorical sentence, 'he dug himself into a hole', in which the conventionality of the expression does not hide the picture called up by its use: the person who digs a hole so deep s/he cannot climb out of it. To show this, I will draw upon an aspect of the interactive theory of metaphor as articulated by David Ritchie. The interactive theory of metaphor, a name coined by Max Black, has as one of its key arguments, that metaphor works on common meanings or ideas that people have for words or objects, meanings or ideas that are not necessarily the literal meaning. When a metaphor is created, some of these common meanings or ideas, which Black termed 'commonplace associations', are called up and others not.<sup>7</sup> This idea was taken up by Lakoff and Johnson, but they also argued that human experience of the world formed the basis of metaphor.<sup>8</sup> Ricoeur remains with Black (that is, metaphor is a language concept, not an experience concept), but like Lakoff and Johnson, explored how metaphor generates truth (through 'new' or 'novel' metaphor) and its fundamentality to discourse in general.<sup>9</sup> Ritchie incorporates ideas from both Lakoff and Johnson and Ricoeur, especially by replacing the language of 'literal meaning' and 'denotation' with 'primary association', and all other meanings of a term such as 'connotation' with 'secondary association'. Ritchie focuses on a point noted by his predecessors: context is the key to understanding how metaphor works. A metaphor calls up secondary associations of the term used of which the context determines which are appropriate. Context includes both that of the one who used the metaphor, and the one who hears the metaphor. The latter may call up different associations of the metaphor, because of what associations they attach to the term, thus interpreting the metaphor differently from what may have been intended. Thus, Ritchie argues against Lakoff and Johnson's idea of 'dead' metaphors, but keeps language open ended in meaning such as Ricoeur argues for.<sup>10</sup> Metaphors, even if highly conventional ('lexicalised'), always keep their metaphoricity, ready to be drawn upon, such as in jokes and puns.

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<sup>7</sup> Max Black, 'Metaphor', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1955): 273-294; *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962). Black essentially refined the theory of I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), chapters 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live by* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 56-184.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. R. Czerny, K. McLaughlin, J. Costello (University of Toronto Romance Series 37; Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Lakoff and Johnson, pp. 226-237.

<sup>10</sup> L. David Ritchie, *Context and Connection in Metaphor* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 96-204.

My analysis of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible, using *'bd* as the key term, will look for the latent associations of key metaphoric uses of *'bd* such as for subjects and officials to the king, vassalship, personal servants, people in relation to God, and deference. To do this, I will briefly summarise the biblical portrayal of slavery to determine possible associations that this social institution calls up. I will then analyse the metaphorical uses of *'bd* just listed to determine which associations fit best. Since I will also be referring to the practice of slavery across the ancient Near East, my study will infer that the same uses in the ancient Near East will be similar to that in the Hebrew Bible. Since a primary meaning for *'bd* is 'slave', I will not use Ritchie's language of 'secondary association' for the associations I am looking for, rather I will use the term 'association'.

## Slavery in the Hebrew Bible

Overviews of the biblical portrayal of slavery abound in the literature,<sup>11</sup> so it is not my intention to simply repeat what has already been said. My focus is to present enough information to justify the associations that might be called up when *'bd* and its equivalents are used metaphorically. However, before I give an outline, a number of issues need to be addressed.

The first is to define what 'slave' means. If I am going to say that the Hebrew word, *'bd*, has as one of its primary associations (i.e. literal meaning), 'slave', I need to make sure 'slave' is the correct word to use. Generally, a definition such as 'a slave is someone whose person and service belongs wholly to another'<sup>12</sup> is a good starting point. However, this reflects a Roman legal definition of slavery,<sup>13</sup> which focuses on a slave as property. As will be seen shortly, slaves are considered as property in the Hebrew Bible, so this definition of 'slave' suits. It is

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g. Victor H. Matthews, 'The Anthropology of Slavery in the Covenant Code', in *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law: Revision, Interpolation and Development*, ed. B.M. Levinson (SJOTSS 181; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) 119-135; Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM, 1974), 199-204; Benjamin G. Wright, 'Ebed/Doulos: terms and Social Status in the Meeting of Hebrew Biblical and Hellenistic Roman Culture', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 83-111; Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (NSBT; Leicester: Apollos, 1999), 28-30. See also I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 10-14, 18-19, 51-53, 65-66, 74; and Ringgren et al, pp. 376-405.

<sup>12</sup> Harris, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Noted in A.E.-M. Bakir, *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (ASALE Supp 18; Cairo: De L'Institut Français D'Archéologie Orientale, 1952), 7.

important have a clear definition, given that some recent scholarship now argues that slavery should be defined as an 'alien will' imposed on a person,<sup>14</sup> and also that in the ancient Near East, slavery was never defined exactly. Even 'bd in the Bible and its ancient Near Eastern equivalents can designate various types of unfree labour arrangements, of which some could be termed metaphoric uses.<sup>15</sup>

A second issue is the lack of information in the Bible on slaves and slavery. The legislation that governs slavery (Ex 21:1-11, 20-21, 26-27; Lev 25:39-55; Deut 15:12-18) is not extensive or uniform. It focuses primarily on Israelite debt-slavery, yet permanent slavery of Israelites is also envisaged. The three sets of legislation are usually understood to reflect different periods of Israelite history, with Ex 21 being codified first and Lev 25 and Dt 15 subsequently.<sup>16</sup> Outside of the law codes, there is only occasional mention of slavery, except for the slave wives of the patriarchs in Genesis 12-50. Consequently it is primarily from the law codes that reconstructions are made of the biblical practice of slavery.<sup>17</sup> A few corollaries result from this. One is that the legislation may not have been enforced, especially in regards to slaves' legal rights. The Bible witnesses, for example, that the manumission legislation in Ex 21:2; Dt 15:12-18 and Lev 25:41-42 was not enforced in the final years of the kingdom of Judah (Jer 34:8-16), and the provision against masters recovering runaway slaves in Dt 23:16-17 [15-16] is not enforced in the early monarchy (1 Kgs 2:39-40). Second, there is also the possibility that the legal status of slaves may be different from 'real' status.<sup>18</sup> For example, Prov 17:2 recognises the standing of 'wise' household slaves. The same two issues face studies into slavery in the wider ancient Near East, despite extant texts from a wide span of

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<sup>14</sup> E.g., A.D. Callahan, R.A. Horsley, A. Smith, 'Introduction: The slavery of New Testament Studies', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 1.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g. Bakir, p. 7. C.f. D.C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East 3100-332 B.C.E.* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997), 123. Marxists used this observation to argue most ancient societies were 'slave societies. See Snell, *Life*, 145-146; Roland Boer, 'The Actuality of Karl Kautsky: on Materialist Reconstructions of Ancient Israel and Early Christianity', *Bible and Critical Theory* 3.3 (2007) 40.1-23 (<http://publications.epress.monash.edu/toc/bc/3/3>).

<sup>16</sup> For discussion, see Matthews, pp. 119-135; Zipporah G. Glass, 'Land, Slave Labor and Law: Engaging Ancient Israel's Economy', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 91 (2000): 27-39; Niels P. Lemche, 'The Manumission of Slaves: The Fallow Year, the Sabbatical Year, the Jubel Year', *VT* 26 (1976): 38-59; and Adrian Schenker, 'The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves: The Road from Exodus to Leviticus', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 78 (1998): 23-41 (who also notes scholarship that does not see inconsistency in the legislation).

<sup>17</sup> The works cited in fn. 16 all focus on the biblical legislation.

<sup>18</sup> C.f. E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 35: 'It seems likely that legal status, slave or free, had little relevance to everyday life at the lowest level of society'.

time that mention or deal with slavery.<sup>19</sup> However, despite the general paucity of texts, it can be affirmed that most ancient Near Easterners ‘made distinctions about what could be done to a slave and not done to someone else.’<sup>20</sup> This is the case with slavery in the Bible.

The Hebrew Bible clearly views a slave as a possession. This is stated in Lev 25:44-46 in reference to foreign persons as slaves, with terms such as *qnh* (‘acquire’) and *’hzh* (‘possession’) used (c.f. Ex 12:44; Is 50:1). Ex 21:21 uses the metaphor, *ky kspw hw* (‘for he is his “money” [‘silver’]’), in reference to a lack of punishment for a master who so physically abuses a slave that the slave dies after a few days. Here, *ksp* associates payment with “money”; that is, silver has been exchanged to purchase the slave, and the lack of punishment of the owner relates to the fact that he has lost the investment that the slave represents. Slaves are also frequently listed with other property a household may own (e.g. Gen 12:16; Ex 20:10, 17; Dt 5:21; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Kgs 5:26; Eccl 2:7). Despite the legal texts permitting only foreigners to be viewed as possessions, not Israelites, it can be assumed that if an Israelite debt-slave becomes a permanent slave, he is the possession of his master,<sup>21</sup> as is a person who is sold as punishment for theft (Ex 22:3b; c.f. Gen 43:18; 44:10, 16-17, 33), and children born to slaves (Ex 21:4). ‘Possession’ therefore should be seen as an association of slavery in the Bible. This is also the case for slavery in other ancient Near Eastern societies.<sup>22</sup> A derived association, ‘control’ can also be postulated, based on the principle that whoever owns something controls how it is used.

Slaves working for their owner is presupposed in Dt 15:12-18 and Lev 25:39-55, which both legislate that Israelites in debt-slavery have the legal status of paid workers. ‘Work’ should thus be seen as an association of slavery in the Bible, even though work is integral to gaining

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<sup>19</sup> On the matter that legislation was not enforced, see Mendelsohn, pp. 59, 76, 83, (Hammurabi’s code); and Ignacio G. Rowe, “‘How can someone sell his own fellow to the Egyptians?’” *Vetus Testamentum* 54 (2004): 341-342 (Ugarit). On the matter of social status, see D.C. Snell, *Flight and Freedom in the Ancient Near East* (Culture & History of the ANE; Leiden: Brill, 2001) for the neo-Babylonian and Persian periods: ‘the status of slavery and dependent labor may not have been uniformly defined and uniformly understood’ (p. 105); and ‘the status of being a slave bore little stigma’ (p. 103).

<sup>20</sup> Snell, *Life*, 123.

<sup>21</sup> See Victor Hurowitz, “‘His Master shall Pierce his Ear with an Awl’ (Exodus 21.6): Marking Slaves in the Bible in Light of Akkadian Sources’, *Proceedings of the American Society for Jewish Research* 58 (1992): 47-77.

<sup>22</sup> Mendelsohn, pp. 34, 50, 58, 64-65; Bakir, p. 69; H.D. Baker, ‘Degrees of Freedom: slavery in mid-first Millennium BC Babylonia’, *World Archaeology* 33 (2001): 19-20, 24. In the Sumerian period, slaves were designated with *sag* (‘head’) (Mendelsohn, p. 34); that is, counted by head as for animals. The same occurred in Egypt: see Ringgren et al, p. 390, citing Bakir.

one's livelihood no matter one's legal or social status (see Lev 23 and Num 28-29, on the matter of setting aside work during festival days).

Slavery due to debt defaulting is the type of slavery most mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Ex 21:2-11 [implied]; Dt 15:12-18; 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:4; Lev 25:39-55; c.f. Amos 2:6-8). This is a temporary enslavement of either six years or forty-nine years,<sup>23</sup> and is considered as service in lieu of debt repayment. 2 Kgs 4:1 and Neh 5:4 indicate debt slavery did occur, it was an ever present threat to poor people, and children were most at risk.<sup>24</sup> Amos 2:6-8 and Neh 5:1-13 place the practice in the wider context of the rich and powerful exploiting poor people.<sup>25</sup> The prevalence of this form of slavery allows for 'debt/poverty' to be seen as an association of slavery in the Bible.

Slavery was not a condition people in the ancient Near East desired, despite some claims that slaves were generally well treated.<sup>26</sup> A number of biblical texts witness to the abuse of slaves: physical assault (Ex 21:20-21); physical coercion for obedience (Prov 29:19; c.f. Lev 25:32); general abuse (Gen 16:6); and abandonment (Gen 21:14; 1 Sam 30:13). The Bible witnesses to parental fear of selling their children into slavery because of debt (2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:4). Slaves running away (Gen 16:6; Dt 23:16-17[15-16]; 1 Sam 25:10; 1 Kgs 2:39-40), something attested regularly in the ancient Near East, can witness to harsh treatment, but it can also be interpreted as a form of protest about not being free.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, 'oppression' should be seen as an association of slavery, even though it is a term that could also describe the lot of the poor in the ancient Near East. Slaves running away also suggests 'flight' be considered as an association of slavery. That is, 'slave/slavery' can also call up images of people who run away.

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<sup>23</sup> Lev 25:39-55 is inconsistent with Ex 21:2 and Dt 15:12-18 because the enslavement period tied to the Jubilee. As noted above (fn. 16) a body of scholarship argues the difference relates to developments in ancient Israelite society, generally centred on archaeological evidence of an expansion of population in the eighth century BCE along with increasing centralisation of government.

<sup>24</sup> The sale of children was also common across the ancient Near East in all periods. See Mendelsohn, pp. 5-6. To this can be added that slavery, or other forms of unfree labour, due to debt defaulting or other renegotiating debts is also widely attested in the ancient Near East, thus making the Hebrew Bible's frequent mention of and concern about this practice in line with other societies of the time. The practice goes back to the third millennium BCE. See Wayne Horowitz, Takayoshi Oshima, 'Hazor 15: A Letter Fragment from Hazor', *IEJ* 57 (2007) 39, and Mendelsohn, *Slavery*, 5-32 (added after Section 3.2 was submitted for publication).

<sup>25</sup> The same occurred in the wider ancient Near East. See Mendelsohn, *Slavery*, 122.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Bakir, p. 90 (for Egypt), followed by D.E. Callender, 'Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings in Israel and the Ancient Near East', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998): 71. C.f. Ringgren et al, p. 389, who cites Mendelsohn, Bakir and Oppenheim.

<sup>27</sup> Mendelsohn, pp. 59, 66; Snell, *Flight*, pp. 137-149.

The oppressive treatment of slaves noted above relates to the situation that slaves have less redress at law than free people do (e.g. Ex 21:20-27, 32; Lev 19:20-22). That is, their legal status is inferior to that of a free person. For example, if their master assaults them so severely so they die after a few days, the master is not punished (Ex 21:20-21). If they were killed by a third party, compensation was given to the master (e.g. Ex 21:32) because the master has lost his *ksp*, whereas the death of a free person is either treated as murder or manslaughter, or a ransom can be imposed if it was due to an animal (Ex 21:30). The most rights slaves have are their freedom if permanently injured by their master (Ex 21:26-27) and protection from recovery by their master when they ran away (Dt 23:16-17 [15-16]). The lesser status of slaves in comparison to the free is continued in the biblical Wisdom texts which presuppose the social inferiority of slaves (Prov 19:10; 30:22; Eccl 10:7). Added to this is that what few rights slave had could be disregarded, as already noted. The inferiority of slaves to the free is also witnessed to in ancient Near Eastern documents in which manumitted slaves sought to prove they are free.<sup>28</sup> Despite some argument that slaves bore no stigma in wider society,<sup>29</sup> there is no doubt that ‘inferior status’ should be considered as an association of slavery.

The Bible also portrays a slave woman’s sexuality as being a factor in her enslavement. Ex 21:4 indicates that a male slave can be given a wife; and Ex 21:7-11, Dt 21:10-14, Gen 16, and 30:1-13 show that slave women could be married to the master or one of the master’s sons.<sup>30</sup> A complaint in Neh 5:4, *some of our daughters have been ravished*, suggests that sale-adoption of girls for debt-defaulting occurred in Nehemiah’s time. Job 31:10 and 2 Sam 6:20 presuppose the exploitation of a slave woman’s sexuality within the household, something attested widely in the ancient Near East.<sup>31</sup> The control or exploitation of a slave woman’s sexuality, despite being common, should be viewed as an aspect of the master’s control over her, derived from his ownership of her.

To summarise, associations of the biblical portrayal of slavery are ‘possession’ (with the derivation, ‘control’), ‘inferior status’, ‘work’, ‘debt/poverty’, ‘oppression’, and ‘propensity

<sup>28</sup> Snell, *Life*, p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> See fn. 18, 19 above. Snell asks the question, why did rich slaves not purchase their freedom (*Life*, p. 104)?

<sup>30</sup> Mendelsohn, pp. 12-14, 53, understands Ex 21:7-11 initially to be sale-adoption legislation, but then argues that it refers to a slave woman who remains in the master’s house and gets married to yet another debt slave.

<sup>31</sup> See Mendelsohn, pp. 6-14, 50-55; and Snell, *Life*, p. 71. This included slave women being forced into prostitution to gain income for the household. Slave sale contracts frequently specify sale-adoption of girls/young women to avoid them being exploited in either way.

to run away'. It is my contention that one or more of these associations lies behind each metaphoric use of *'bd* and the female equivalents, *'mh* and *špḥh*, depending on context. At times, these latent associations will be drawn upon when the use of one of these terms moves beyond the lexical.

### **Associations of slavery contained within biblical metaphorical uses of slave terms**

As noted above, the key metaphorical uses of slave terms, especially *'bd*, that I wish to discuss are subjects and officials to the king, vassalship, personal servants, people in relation to God, and deference.

One key metaphorical use of slave terms occurs in the designation of people as the king's subjects.<sup>32</sup> This use of slave terms is infrequent in the Hebrew Bible, in keeping with the ancient Near East,<sup>33</sup> but it provides a good start for discussions of the metaphoric uses of slave terms. As subjects, people pay taxes to the king, and they may also be subject to corvée labour (c.f. 1 Kgs 5:13-16; 15:22) and periodic military duty (c.f. 1 Chr 27:1-15). This is highlighted in 1 Kgs 12:4, in which the people of Israel ask Rehoboam to lighten these obligations, in return for continued 'serving' him (see also v.7). One association that is called up is 'work', since tax is a form of 'work in kind', and conscription and corvée labour is clearly work. A second association called up is 'inferior status'. *'bd* always designates the subjects, not the king, which indicates their lesser status in relation to their leader. The context of 1 Kgs 12:4 also suggests that the association, 'oppression' can also be called up; that is, the king can rule his subjects harshly, openly stated in 1 Sam 8:10-18. The behaviour in 1 Sam 8 suggests that a king might be seen as 'owner' of his people; that is the use of *'bd* for subjects might call up the association 'possession'. Subjects are expected to be loyal to the king, so this use of *'bd* will bring in an association of 'loyalty'. However, the Bible does not present

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<sup>32</sup> *'bd* (verb: 'to serve'): Judg 9:28; 1 Kgs 12:4. *'bd* (noun: 'servant'): 1 Sam 29:10; 1 Kgs 20:6; 1 Chr 21:3; 2 Chr 8:18; c.f. Gen 21:25; and 1 Sam 27:12. *'dwn* ('master/lord'): 1 Sam 29:10; 11:9, 13; 1 Kgs 12:27; 22:17; Ps 45:12[11].

<sup>33</sup> The Akkadian term, *arad*, is used in this way in an early Babylonian seal (Halla, §429), in the Amarna letters (EA 8, 29, 40, 55, 96, 101, 164, 239, 271; 249, 250). See also *The Assyrian Dictionary (CAD)* 1A,II: 250. Egyptian kings or high officials rarely designated subjects with 'servant'.



an ideal of slaves being loyal, despite showing it could happen (Gen 24; Prov 17:2), which appears to be in keeping with the wider ancient Near East.<sup>34</sup>

A related form of subjection to a king is the subjection of one nation to another; that is, vassalship. In the Hebrew Bible, *'bd* is used in this context,<sup>35</sup> which is in keeping with equivalent terms in this context in the wider ancient Near East.<sup>36</sup> A number of associations are called up in this use of *'bd*. 'Work' is clearly applicable because of the tribute imposed on the vassal nation and its king, along with any corvée or military duty.<sup>37</sup> Tribute represents work in kind, while corvée or military duty is clearly a form of work for the suzerain. 'Oppression' is also called up, since the vassal king has obligations imposed on him, and he cannot free himself from vassalage, except by rebellion or accepting vassalship to an alternate strong power. 'Inferior status' is also called up, since a vassal has less status than the suzerain. 'Possession' is also called up, because of the rhetoric of the suzerain 'owning' the vassal's lands, sometimes played upon by vassals.<sup>38</sup> The calling up of these associations indicates the vassal-suzerain relationship is viewed in the Bible (and in the ancient Near East) as qualitatively the same as slavery. As for the subject to the king, 'loyalty' is also called up.<sup>39</sup>

The term *'bd* is frequently applied to personal servants.<sup>40</sup> Two synonyms are also used, *n'r* ('young man') and *šrt* ('to serve'), with *n'r* the more frequent.<sup>41</sup> For all three terms, the legal status of the 'servant' in question is usually not specified.<sup>42</sup> The relationship is a formal

<sup>34</sup> Bakir, Mendelsohn and Snell do not discuss this. Baker, p. 20, also notes neo-Babylonian texts do not indicate masters' attitudes to slaves.

<sup>35</sup> *'bd* (verb): e.g. Gen 14:4; Deut 28:48; 1 Sam 17:9; 2 Kgs 18:7; Jer 27:7-17. *'bd* (noun): e.g. 1 Sam 17:9; 2 Sam 8:2, 6, 14; 2 Kgs 17:3; 24:1; 2 Chr 12:8; Neh 9:36. *'bdh* (noun: 'slavery/service'): 2 Chr 12:8; Ezra 9:8-9.

<sup>36</sup> F. Charles Fensham, 'Notes on Treaty Terminology in Ugaritic Epics', *Ugaritic-Forshungen* 11 (1979) 269; *CAD* Vol. 1, Part II, pp. 248-253; and Jeremy Black, Andrew George, Nicholas Postgate, ed., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (SANTAG 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 434.

<sup>37</sup> The frequently used refrain, 'house of slaves' (*byt 'bdym*) for Egypt refers to Israel's vassalage to Egypt. In Josh 9:23, *'bd* is used for the subjugation of the Gibeonites. The vassal kings to Egypt in the Amarna letters frequently term their military obligations to Egypt as 'service' (EA 114, 151, 152, 155, 156, 165, 171, 189, 193, 241, 253).

<sup>38</sup> See the Amarna letters, and also an Aramaic letter of a vassal to Egypt in the late seventh century BCE. See H.L. Ginsberg, 'An Aramaic Contemporary of the Lachish Letters', *BASOR* 111 (1948) 24-27. The vassals appeal to the suzerain to protect their possession.

<sup>39</sup> Loyalty to the suzerain is specified in vassal-suzerain treaties. Punishment for vassal disloyalty by the kingdom of Judah is found in 2 Kgs 18-19 and 24:1-17.

<sup>40</sup> *'bd* (noun only): e.g. Gen 26:15-32; Judg 6:27; 2 Sam 9:12; Neh 5:13; Job 19:16; Prov 12:9.

<sup>41</sup> *n'r* (masculine): e.g. Gen 22:3-5; Num 22:22; Judg 9:11; 1 Sam 9:5-8; 2 Sam 9:9; 13:17, 28-29; 19:18 [17]; 2 Kgs 4:12; 8:4; Neh 6:5. *n'rh* (feminine, 'young woman'): e.g. Gen 24:61; Ex 2:5; 1 Sam 25:42; Esth 4:16; Prov 9:3; 31:15. *šrt* (Piel verbal stem only): e.g. Ex 23:13; 2 Sam 13:17-18; 1 Kgs 1:4; 19:21; 2 Kgs 6:15.

<sup>42</sup> W.F. Albright, 'The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preëxilic History of Judah, with Some Observations on Ezekiel', *JBL* 51 (1932): 82, argues *n'r* designates a free person, but van der Ploeg, p. 86, and Revell, p. 33 argue

relationship: the one being served is either the employer or owner of the one giving the service. In this setting for *'bd*, the association 'work' is called up, clearly because the 'servant' serves the other; that is, works for the other. 'Loyalty' is also called up in this setting, highlighted by the punishment of Gehazi in 2 Kgs 5.<sup>43</sup> 'Inferior status' is also called up, as the servant is clearly inferior to the one who receives the service.

At a higher level of service is the use of *'bd* for courtiers of the king,<sup>44</sup> including officials and high officials.<sup>45</sup> The same occurs for slavery terms in the wider ancient Near East.<sup>46</sup> This use of slave terms also calls up the association 'work', because courtiers and officials work for the king and are delegated by him to do tasks. Similarly, 'inferior status' is also called up, as courtiers and officials have lesser status than the king. 'Loyalty' is heightened in this context, indicated by the gifting of land as a reward (1 Sam 22:7; c.f. 8:14; Ezek 46:17), demotion for disobedience (2 Sam 18-19),<sup>47</sup> the killing of high ranking supporters of a previous king in a *coup d'etat* or purge by a new king (e.g. 1 Kgs 2; 2 Kgs 10:11), and is presupposed in texts in which officials rebel against their king.<sup>48</sup> A new feature not present in the other metaphorical uses of slave terms discussed so far is that courtiers and officials have authority, power and status, derived from their close proximity to the king and their role as his delegates when carrying on his business. Thus, *'bd* in this relationship context carries the idea of status, which is not present in the other relationship contexts so far discussed.<sup>49</sup>

*'bd* is also used metaphorically for notable individuals in relation to God, a phenomenon paralleled in the wider ancient Near East. As for the use of *'bd* for courtiers and officials, the

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that it can cover slaves, with Revell adding that it designates a person of the lowest socio-economic class(es). The use of *n'r* in the Eliakim seal and for Abraham's allies in Gen 14:24 shows that Revell's observation is not correct. van der Ploeg, also argues that *šrt* designates 'noble service' (pp. 86-87), a view also of K. Engelken, 'שרת', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament Vol. 15*, ed., G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry, trans. D.E. Green (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: 2006) 503-514. *šrt* seems to take the place of the verb form of *'bd* for personal service.

<sup>43</sup> For *šrt*, Engelken, p. 508 comments, 'all *šrt* servants are expected to be trustworthy and loyal'.

<sup>44</sup> *'bd* (noun): e.g. Gen 41:37-38; Judg 3:24; 1 Sam 16:15; 22:6; 28:7; 2 Sam 8:7; 12:18-21; 15:14-18; 1 Kgs 3:15; 10:13; 20:23; 2 Kgs 10:5,8,13; 11:17; Esth 3:2-3; Prov 14:35; Jer 21:7; 22:4; 46:26; Ezek 46:17; 1 Sam 28:25. *n'r*: Esth 2:2; 6:3, 5. The context of Esther suggests that *n'r* designates personal assistants.

<sup>45</sup> *'bd* (noun) only: Ex 7:28-29 [8:3-4] through to 12:30; 1 Sam 29:3; 2 Sam 10:2-4; 17:20; 1 Kgs 15:18; 2 Kgs 6:8, 11; 22:12.

<sup>46</sup> See fn. 5.

<sup>47</sup> 2 Sam 18:5, 9-15 (disobedience); 19:1-8 (rudeness and criticism), 13 (demotion). Joab has done similarly in 2 Sam 3:24-25. Both incidents factor in David's instructions to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:5-6 to eliminate Joab.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. 1 Kgs 11:26; 2 Kgs 12:21-22 [20-21]; 14:5; 21:23 (Ringgren et al, p. 392).

<sup>49</sup> It could be argued that 'status' may map from situations when slaves have more apparent social status than what their technical legal status is.

association ‘work’ is called up. This is certainly the case for prophets,<sup>50</sup> whose roles are generally that of spokespersons for God. Kings ‘work’ for God by promoting ideals of justice and the worship of God. Patriarchs (in the Book of Genesis) ‘work’ relates to acts of worship (e.g. sacrifices) and other ritual they engage in. But in all three cases, it is the designated person’s loyalty to God that warrants their designation as *‘bd*. This is shown for the kings by the use of *‘bd* solely for David and Hezekiah, both who are portrayed as exceptionally devoted to God.<sup>51</sup> In this, the Hebrew Bible goes somewhat against the wider ancient Near East, in which kings are regularly viewed, or promoted themselves, as the servant of the chief national deity.<sup>52</sup> Thus, ‘loyalty’ is also an association for notable individuals as *‘bd* of God. It needs to be noted that though ‘work’ and ‘loyalty’ are associations common to all three groups of people, the type of ‘work’ done for God is different.

The use of slave terms in deference, either to people or to God, represents a use of slavery as a metaphor for relative status rather than absolute status. Such deference is used in a wide variety of contexts (formal and informal relationships), for a wide variety of purposes (requests, thanks, self-defence, criticism), and by a wide range of people to an equally wide range of people, which can include a social equal to the speaker. Good examples are Gen 33:1-16; 44:18-33; 1 Sam 1:11; 25:24-31, 41; 2 Sam 14; 19; and Ps 86. As noted earlier, the use of slave terms in deference goes back in the ancient Near East to at least 2200 BCE. The typical biblical form of deference is *‘dny* (‘my lord’) for the (male) hearer/reader, *‘bdk* (‘your servant’) for a male speaker/writer, and *a’mtk* and *špḥtk* (both mean ‘your [female] servant’). Sometimes a more impersonal ‘his (male/female) servant’ is used by a speaker, especially in relation to the king, for which *hmlk* (‘the king’) is used for the hearer. The use of these terms replaces the first and second person in the speaker’s communication or in a prayer, but generally the replacement is not complete.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> E.g. 2 Kgs 21:10; Jer 7:25; 25:4; 35:15; 44:4; Ezek 38:17; Dan 9:6; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6. This includes the ‘servant of the LORD’ (*‘bd yhw*).

<sup>51</sup> For David: see e.g. 1 Kgs 11:32-34; 2 Kgs 19:34; Ps 18:1 [title]; 78:70; 132:10; Jer 33:21-26; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25. For Hezekiah, see 2 Chr 32:16. For their devotion, see 1 Sam 13:4; 16:7; 2 Kgs 18:5; 2 Chr 31:20-21. Why other ‘good’ kings such as Josiah are not given the *‘bd* designation is a mystery.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g. H. Frankfort, pp. 10 (Babylon, Assyria), 240-242, 248, 254 (Assyria). Royal ideology in both the Hebrew Bible and in the wider ancient Near East is discussed extensively, but cannot be dealt with here.

<sup>53</sup> The same incomplete use of master-slave deference occurs throughout letters in the ancient Near East. See texts indicated in fn. 3-4 above.

Deference is a form of speech in which the speaker humbles and/or abases himself and portrays the hearer (or recipient of a letter) as being of a higher status than him.<sup>54</sup> But why choose master-slave language as part of deference? It is clear that ancient peoples recognised associations of slavery as being salient to relative status contexts. In all cases, the association of slavery called up is ‘inferior status’: the person who uses slave terms always takes the role of the inferior. As a corollary, the person in the role of the social superior has ‘power’ over the one using deference, whether it is formal<sup>55</sup> or informal.<sup>56</sup> Occasionally the association, ‘possession’ is played upon in prayer (Ps 86:16; 143:12). This creates a relationship with God that is qualitatively the same as the master-slave relationship, but it is a device to assist in the appeal for a favourable answer to what is being requested of God.<sup>57</sup> ‘Loyalty’ is an association that is also sometimes called up in the use of slave terms in deference. In many cases, this association moves from being lexicalised. In Psalms, the deferential use of *‘bd* is always connected with expressions of loyalty.<sup>58</sup> In narrative it can imply loyalty to soften rejection of an offer (2 Sam 19:34-37) or create a false persona (in 2 Sam 13:24; 15:7 *‘bd* deference hides murderous and rebellious intentions). Similar occurs in the Amarna letters, in which vassals who are warring amongst themselves appeal to the king of Egypt for military help, each claiming they are loyal ‘servants’ to Egypt and the other/s is/are disloyal.<sup>59</sup>

## Conclusions

The biblical portrayal of slavery shows that certain ideas associated with slavery could be called to mind in when slave terms are used metaphorically. These are ‘possession’ (with the derived association, ‘control’), ‘inferior status’, ‘work’, ‘debt/poverty’, ‘oppression’, and ‘propensity to run away’.

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<sup>54</sup> Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (SIS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 178. For applications of politeness theory to deference in Judg-2 Kgs, see Revell, pp.267-274; and in the Lachish Letters, see Edward J. Bridge, ‘Politeness in the Lachish Letters’, VT 61 (2011) [forthcoming].

<sup>55</sup> E.g. king over a subject (2 Sam 14; 19:34-37), official over a subject (2 Sam 20:15-22), king over an official (2 Sam 14:22; 24:3), high official over a foreigner (Gen 44:18-34), and God over a worshipper (e.g. 1 Sam 1:11; Ps 116; 119:122-125).

<sup>56</sup> E.g. David over Abigail (1 Sam 25:23-31), Nabal over David (1 Sam 25:8), and Elisha as a prophet over the foreign military captain, Naaman (2 Kgs 5:17-19).

<sup>57</sup> See Bridge, ‘Loyalty’, pp. 373, 377.

<sup>58</sup> Bridge, pp. 368-374.

<sup>59</sup> Most of the claims of loyalty are contained in formulaic statements such as ‘I am your servant/ loyal servant,’ etc. This is prominent in Rib-Hadda’s correspondence (EA 74-138) and those by southern Canaanite kings (EA 180-371).

In the metaphorical use of *'bd* for subjects to a king, the associations, 'work', 'inferior status' and an additional association, not drawn from ancient Israelite thinking of slavery, 'loyalty', are called up. The same three associations, along with 'oppression' and 'possession' are called up in the use of *'bd* for vassalship. That five associations are called up for vassalship indicates the biblical writers viewed it little different from slavery. When a king oppresses the people, these same additional associations are also called up, thus showing biblical authors also viewed subjection to a cruel king qualitatively the same as slavery. When *'bd* is used for personal servants, the associations of 'work', 'inferior status' and 'loyalty' are called up, similar as for a king's subjects. The same associations are also called up for when *'bd* is used for courtiers and officials of the king. That is, they are viewed as similar to personal servants and subjects. However, an association, 'status' is also called up, due to officials and courtiers' closeness to power, and work for the king. When *'bd* is used for notable individuals in relation to God, the associations of 'work' and 'loyalty' are called up, with the latter being the most important. The use of *'bd* and its feminine equivalents in deference varies from the other metaphoric uses of *'bd*, calling up only the association 'inferior status' in all uses. However, in prayer, 'possession' is frequently called up by *'bd*, moving its use beyond a lexicalised use, and in many speeches by characters in narrative, 'loyalty' is called up, some of which also move beyond lexicalised use.

The common element in all metaphorical uses of slave terms is the association 'inferior status'. This indicates awareness that Israelite society in the biblical period was hierarchical and people were conscious of who was above and below them in social status. But power is also part of this stratification, brought out especially in how slave terms are used in deference. Even if the hearer is an equal to or even a social inferior to the speaker, it is his ability to exercise power over the speaker that prompts the use of master-slave deference. Loyalty also predominates across the metaphoric uses of *'bd*, indicating that the socially inferior were expected to support the socially superior in some fashion. That this could be played upon in deference indicates such expectations did not always occur. Though this study has focussed on the Hebrew Bible, references to other ancient Near Eastern texts suggests the same conclusions can be made for the region, especially since the metaphoric use of slave terms antedated the biblical writings and made them already lexicalised during the biblical period.

### 3.3. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Since submitting Section 3.2 for publication, I came across Westbrook's article, 'Slave and Master in ancient Near Eastern Law'.<sup>60</sup> Essentially it is a review of the ancient Near Eastern practice of slavery, in similar fashion to Mendelsohn, with a focus on the legal aspects of the master-slave relationship. Similarly with Mendelsohn and Snell, Westbrook recognises laws and treatment of slaves varied from region to region and from period to period. His understanding of the status of slaves and their 'rights' is similar to what I have presented in Section 3.2, with slaves as 'property' emphasised. To this can be added Yamada's article, 'The Hittite Social Concept of "Free" in the Light of the Emar texts, in which he analyses the use of ÌR (logogram for 'slave') in Emar texts, showing also the difficulty of determining the distinction between 'slave' and 'free'.<sup>61</sup> He also shows the frequent use of ÌR for men in the service of the king, either as courtiers or in some other form of royal service, in keeping with other ancient Near Eastern societies, and the Hebrew Bible.

Also since submitting Section 3.2 for publication, I came across other articles relating to women in slavery: Westbrook, 'The Female Slave,' and Pressler, 'Wives and Daughters, Bond and Free.' Neither added anything new to my brief discussion of women in slavery, affirming also that slave women's sexuality was controlled by their master. However, they varied in their understanding of the application of the legislation of Ex 21:2-11. In vv.7-11, Westbrook considers two scenarios are envisaged: sale-marriage to a son of the master (v.9) and sale-marriage to the master himself (vv.8, 10-11).<sup>62</sup> Pressler, however, understands the legislation (including vv.2-6) to cover a number of roles for women: it refers to women 'in the roles of wife, daughter, slave wife of a free man, and slave wife of a bondsman.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Raymond Westbrook, 'Slave and Master in Ancient Near Eastern Law', in *The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 1: The Shared Tradition* (eds, B. Wells; F.R. Magdalene; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009) 161-216, repr. of 'Slave and Master in Ancient Near Eastern Law', *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70 (1995) 1631-1676.

<sup>61</sup> Masamichi Yamada, 'The Hittite Social Concept of 'Free' in the Light of the Emar Texts', *AoF* 22 (1995) 301-316.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond Westbrook, 'The Female Slave', in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSS 262; eds, V.H. Matthews, B.M. Levinson, T. Frymer-Kensky; London: T&T Clark, 1998) 236-237.

<sup>63</sup> Carolyn Pressler, 'Wives and Daughters, Bond and Free: Views of Women in the Slave Laws of Exodus 21.2-11' in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSS 262; eds, V.H. Matthews, B.M. Levinson, T. Frymer-Kensky; London: T&T Clark, 1998) 147-172, quote is from p.148.

In the discussion of slave women's sexuality, comment was not made about the matter of male slave sexuality. Ex 21:4 gives recognition to male desire, but otherwise their sexuality is not considered nor mentioned in the Bible. The narrative of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Gen 39, though exonerating Joseph, indicates a potential problem with male slaves: sexual liaisons with the free women of the household. This may explain Bakir's comment that Egyptians in the New Kingdom period onwards preferred female slaves over male slaves.<sup>64</sup> The only other reference to a male slave is in 1 Chr 2:34-35, where a foreign male slave became the husband of one of his master's daughters.

However, there is the possibility that some male slaves were castrated, due to the phenomenon of castrated officials both in the Bible and in the wider ancient Near East. Castration in ancient Israel is witnessed to in Is 56:3-5 (סָרִיס is used as the designation) and can be inferred, as the NRSV translates, for the סָרִיסִים in Esth 2:3-15; 4:4-5 and 2 Kgs 9:32, who have oversight over or attend royal women. The term סָרִיס is debated as to whether it solely means 'castrated man/official' or can have a wider meaning, such as 'official' without regard to sexual status (i.e. as a synonym to עֶבֶד and שָׂר).<sup>65</sup> Leeb puts the discussion into a larger argument that men who were officials of a king meant their king controlled their sexuality and procreation because they had become part of the king's 'household' by being denied 'legitimated opportunities to participate in sexuality and procreation.'<sup>66</sup> Though Leeb is right to emphasise that officials' identity become based on the king's household (see Chapter 1.1, fn.10), her argument that the king controlled their sexuality goes too far. Tadmor indicates in the Persian Empire that high ranking eunuchs could marry, adopt children and bequeath their wealth to them.<sup>67</sup> As noted above, the gifting of land as a reward for faithful officials (1 Sam 22:7; c.f. 8:14; Ezek 46:17) presupposes them having wives and families. Only when an official or courtier can be proved to be castrated can Leeb's argument hold.

<sup>64</sup> Bakir, *Slavery*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> For the former, see Hayim Tadmor, 'Was the Biblical sārîs a Eunuch?' in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (eds, Z. Zevit, S. Gitri, M. Sokoloff; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 317-325. For the latter, see R.D. Patterson, 'סָרִיס (sārîs) official, eunuch', in *TWOT* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 634-635; and *The Assyrian Dictionary (CAD)* 14: 296 (for the Akkadian equivalent, *rēšu* in *ša rēši*). Jer 38:7 suggests there was a group of officials/courtiers in Judah designated with סָרִיס.

<sup>66</sup> Carolyn S. Leeb, 'Polygyny - Insights from Rural Haiti', in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed., P.F. Esler; London: SCM, 2005) 50-65.

<sup>67</sup> Tadmor, 'Biblical sārîs,' 321, n.17. Tadmor argues the practice also occurred in the Byzantine and Han (Chinese) empires.

A comment was made also in relation to the use of עֶבֶד for the subjects of a king, that the king may be viewed as an ‘owner’ of his people. This relates to the lexicalised use of slave terms for subjects, courtiers and officials, along with vassalship, which, as discussed above, antedates the biblical writings. A question arises, does the metaphorical use of slave terms call up associations with the court, or to slavery? This issue is partly addressed in Chapters 8.2.1 and 9.2.3 and discussed fully in Chapter 10.2. Certainly, one of the key images for God, if not the key image, is ‘king’, but this does not mean that the metaphorical use of slave terms in relation to God (and in other contexts) automatically evokes associations with the royal court instead of slavery.

Section 3.2 indicates in a broad fashion some of the differences between the metaphoric uses of slave terms. This prepares for the detailed listing in Chapter 4, which itself sets the ground work for the analytical work covered in Chapters 5 to 9. The terms focussed on in Chapter 4, as discussed in Chapter 1.3, are עֶבֶד for men and אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה for women, as well as the verb form of עֶבֶד and the opposite, אֲדֹנִי (‘my lord’).



## CHAPTER 4

### THE USE OF SLAVE TERMS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

#### 4.1. DEVELOPING A SYSTEM TO LIST THE USAGES OF SLAVE TERMS

Chapter 3 has given a broad indication of some of the differences between the metaphoric uses of slave terms. That is, associations evoked in the metaphoric use of slavery vary between types of use. Chapter 4 tightens this by giving a comprehensive listing of the uses of the עבד word-group and its equivalents (שפחה and אמה; נער; also אדון as the opposite term) in the Hebrew Bible. Its purpose is to show the wide range of use of the terms in the Bible, categorise them according to the associations of slavery that were determined in Chapter 3, and provide the ‘raw data’ for my analyses in Chapters 5 to 9. My list also shows up inadequacies in the lists provided in the lexica, dictionaries and other studies. For example, the use of עבד for fighting men (e.g. 2 Sam 2:12-17 and 3:22) is frequently not noted. My listing also has the advantage that אמה and שפחה, and נער and נערה, when used as synonyms to עבד, are placed together. This permits easy determination of when terms are used synonymously and when they are used differently, along with the contexts of the latter situation.

My list follows the usual schema in the lexica and dictionaries, that is, it starts with the ‘literal’ referent of the slave terms and then moves to metaphorical meanings.<sup>1</sup> Its unique

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, et al, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994-1999) 12-13, 707-708, 773-773, 1620-1622. The relevant articles in the *TDOT* are: O. Eissfeldt, ‘אֶדֹן, ’adhôn; אֶדְנִי, ’adhōnāi’, in *TDOT* Vol. 1 (eds, G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren; trans., J.T. Willis; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 61-62; H.F. Fuhs, ‘נָעַר na‘ar, etc’, in *TDOT* Vol. 9 (eds, G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry; trans. D.E. Green; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 474-485; E. Reuter, ‘שִׁפְחָה šiphâ’, in *TDOT* Vol. 15 (eds, G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry; trans. D.E. Green; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006) 405-410; H. Ringgren, H. Simian-Yofre, U. Rüterwörden, ‘עֶבֶד ’ēbed; עֲבָדָה “bōdâ”, in *TDOT* Vol. 10 (eds, G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry; trans. D.W. Stott; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: 1992) 376-405. The *TDOT* does not list אמה as a separate lexical item.

See also Brown, F., Driver, S.R., Briggs, C.A., Gesenius, W., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979 [1907]) 712-715; David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993+) 309-310, 708-712; H.J. Austel, ‘Shipḥâ. Maidservant, maid’, in *TWOT* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago, 1980) 946-947; W.C. Kaiser, ‘עֶבֶד (’ēbad) work, serve’, in *TWOT* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 639-640; B.K. Waltke, ‘Ba‘al’, in *TWOT* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 119-120; W. Zimmerli, J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (SBT; transs, H. Knight, J. Jeremias and others; SCM, 1965) 11-36 (a reprint and translation of part of an entry in the German edition of *TDNT*).

Other works that also provide useful listings and/or studies of the range of use of some of the terms are: J.P.M. van der Ploeg, ‘Slavery in the Old Testament’, in *Congress Volume, Uppsala, 1971* (SVT 22; Leiden: Brill, 1972) 72-87; Curt Lindhagen, *The Servant Motif in the Old Testament* (Uppsala: Lundquistska Bokhandeln,

feature, apart from being comprehensive, is that the metaphorical meanings are organised on an *explicit basis* of increasing metaphoricity. Metaphoricity is determined on the basis of increasing movement away from slavery and work contexts to non-formalised relations, then deference and finally to the use of slave terms in relation to God. Each category of metaphorical use of slave terms in the list is then matched with the associations of slavery that were determined in Chapter 3 to show what aspect of slavery is being drawn upon. This avoids the imposition of one clear guiding descriptor or structural metaphor that guides organisation and interpretation of the slave terms. Because of the frequent use of noun and verb forms of עֶבֶד, some categories of use (e.g. עֶבֶד used for a king's officials) have representative references, chosen from a close reading of the Hebrew Bible and with assistance of concordances such as those by Lisowsky and Mandelkern.<sup>2</sup> Some of these categories are given complete lists of references in later chapters (e.g. the use of עֶבֶד in Psalms and other prayer for deference [Chapter 8] and עֶבֶד used for prophets [Chapter 9]).

There is always an element of subjectivity in a classification system. Placing the use of slave terms in relation to God last in the list implies that such use is the most metaphorical. Conceptually this is true, but ancient Israelites may not have understood this to be the case. Some people are portrayed in the Bible as speaking to God in as though face-to-face (e.g. patriarchs, prophets). Prayer, both in Psalms and in narrative, presupposes God hears like a person does. The same is the case with people who are designated as עֶבֶד יְהוָה, such as prophets, where their spokesperson role is less 'metaphoric' than the use of slave terms in deference. The same happens for the use of the Qal infinitive of עֶבֶד and עֲבוֹדָה/עֲבָדָה for the duties of the priests and Levites in the tabernacle and in the temple (e.g. Num 3-4; 7-8; 18; 1 Chr 9:13, 19; 23-26). Surprisingly, they are not designated as עֶבֶד יְהוָה.<sup>3</sup> They are simply God's workers. However, other narrative (e.g. 1 Sam 1:10-18; 14:36-42; 23:9-12) and the Holiness legislation in the Book of Leviticus show that Israelites retained awareness that God was 'other'. Prophets' teaching and narrative such as Ex 32-33 and 1 Kgs 19:11-13 indicate that God had no physical form.<sup>4</sup> Kingship imagery applied to God is stretched beyond what is

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1950) 40-81, 262-291; and Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983) 18-46 (reprint of an earlier publication).

<sup>2</sup> L. Lisowsky (ed.), *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, 1958); S. Mandelkern, et al., *Concordance on the Bible* (New York, 1955)

<sup>3</sup> Compare Section 4.2.11 with 4.2.11.3.

<sup>4</sup> Noted in in Chapter 1.3 and 2.1. See A.L. Warren-Rothlin, 'Body Idioms and The Psalms', in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (eds, P.S. Johnston, D.G. Firth; Leicester: Apollos, 2005) 210.

humanly possible.<sup>5</sup> Even in idolatry, despite idols representing the divine in usually humanoid form, grotesque features and the need for priests and rituals still keeps awareness that the deity is ‘other’. Despite the sense of familiarity with God frequently found in the Hebrew Bible, there is justification for understanding language used for God as metaphoric, and as the most metaphoric.

The organisation of my list of meanings and uses for Hebrew slave terms accepts the consensus that the Hebrew verb carries the primary meanings or designations.<sup>6</sup> For the עָבַד word group, עָבַד ‘he works/labours’ (to use the lexical definition) represents the primary designation. The equivalents, אָמַה, שִׁפְחָה, נָעַר, and אָדוֹן as the opposite term, are only found in noun forms.

Understanding the עָבַד word group’s primary meaning as ‘work’ makes its use for slavery a derived or metaphoric use of the word group. This would make עָבַד (‘slave’) a conceptual metaphor, ‘slavery is working for another’. However, as shown in Sections 4.2.1-2 below, no noun form of עָבַד is used to denote people who work, even when working for others, except for eight uses of the Qal participle, עֹבֵד/עֹבֵדָה. Despite עָבַד being derived from עָבַד, ‘slave’ is its primary designation and ‘work’ becomes an association of slavery, as has been discussed in Chapter 3.2. However, no new verb is coined, so there is the situation that two nouns occur each with their primary meaning and one verb does duty as the verb equivalent for both.<sup>7</sup> For the sake of clarity, I will treat the use of עָבַד when denoting ‘to serve as a slave’ as a primary meaning in addition to ‘to work’.

The list focuses on terms for slaves. The opposite, אָדוֹן, has not been focused on because it is present in all contexts, whereas the appearing of the terms for ‘slave’ varies. However, a similar but brief list of the uses of אָדוֹן is given in Section 4.4.1 to provide a balance for Section 4.2. A similar list is also given for the synonym שֶׁרָת in Section 4.4.2, to provide also further comparison with and contrast to Section 4.2.

<sup>5</sup> See Marc Z. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSS 76; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) 162-164.

<sup>6</sup> An exception to the consensus is noted below and in fn.7, accepted also by Henry O. Thompson, Fawzi Zayadine, ‘The Tell Siran Inscription’, *BASOR* 212 (1973) 9, in their translation of the Ammonite Tell Siran inscription.

<sup>7</sup> This keeps alive conceptual awareness that slavery is specific a form of labour, and that עָבַד, despite its primary designation, ‘slave’, is derived from עָבַד, even if biblical writers did not think consciously about it.

## **4.2. THE USES OF THE SLAVE TERMS**

### **4.2.1. Work/labour**

The primary meaning or designation of the עֲבַד word group as ‘he works/labours’ has two aspects: the fact of doing work and the work being preformed; and the one who does the work.

#### **4.2.1.1. WORKING**

Under the designation of doing work and the work being performed, there are two specific designations.

The first is ‘general working or labouring’.

For עֲבַד: Gen 2:5, 15; 3:23; Ex 5:18; 20:9; 34:21; Deut 5:13; 15:19; 28:39; 2 Sam 9:10; 2 Chr 2:18 [17]; Isa 28:21; 30:24; Jer 27:11; Ezek 36:9. The Aramaic equivalent עֲבַד in Ezra, Daniel, and Jer 10:11, takes the meaning ‘to do’ or ‘to make’. Most references are to agricultural work.

For עֲבַדָּה/עֲבָדָה: Ex 1:14; 5:9, 11; 39:32, 42; Num 4:30; 28-29 (in conjunction with מִלְאכָה); 1 Chr 4:21; 27:26; Neh 3:5; 10:38[37]; Ps 104:14, 23; Isa 28:21 (God’s work of judgement on Judah).

When used to refer to the work of construction of the tabernacle or repairs to the temple, עֲבַדָּה is occasionally paired with מִלְאכָה: Ex 35:24; 36:1-5; 2 Chr 24:12; 34:13.

The second is ‘the work of tabernacle/temple staff’.<sup>8</sup>

For Qal infinitive of עֲבַד in the formula, לַעֲבֹד אֶת-עֲבָדָה, see e.g. Num 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 30, 47; 7:5; 8:11, 15, 19, 22; 16:9; 18:6-7, 23.

For עֲבַדָּה/עֲבָדָה: Num 3-4; 7-8; 18; 1 Chr 6:33 [48]; 9:13, 19; 23:24-32; 24:3, 19; 25:6; 26:8; 2 Chr 8:14; 31:2, 16, 21 (referring to Hezekiah’s organising of the temple staff); 35:2, 15; Neh 10:33 [32]; Ezek 44:14.

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<sup>8</sup> C.f. Milgrom, *Studies*, 18-46, 60; Ringgren et al, ‘עֲבַד,’ 383; Nicolas Wyatt, ‘When Adam Delved: The Meaning of Genesis III 23’, *VT* 38 (1988) 119. Wyatt also accepts ‘work’ as the primary meaning for עֲבַד.

עבדה is often paired with מלאכה or צבא, especially in Numbers to denote the duties of the priests and Levites.

It needs to be noted that מלאכה is more commonly used in the Bible to designate unspecified work than the עבד word group. This allows for Zimmerli to argue that the meaning for the verb עָבַד should be derived from the noun forms, of which עֶבֶד is the most frequently used: 'The noun hardly ever implies "work",' and therefore the word group primarily denotes relationship, especially that of 'belonging'.<sup>9</sup> But the references listed all relate to work or duties without reference to working for another person. As the list shows, there is enough use of these designations to allow 'work' to be viewed as the primary designation for the עבד word group.

#### 4.2.1.2. WORKER/LABOURER

A logical step from designating 'work/labour' is to designate the people who work/labour. For the עבד word group, the Qal participle of עָבַד is used as a substantive: 'the one who works/labours'; 'the working/labouring ones' (עֹבְדִים, עֹבְדוֹת); that is, 'worker'. This use is found in Gen 4:2; Prov 12:11; 28:19; Eccl 5:11[12]; Isa 19:9; Ezek 48:18, 19; Zech 13:5; an infrequent use in the Bible. Instead of 'worker', people who do work are usually designated with substantives derived from the task being done (e.g. 'tiller' [= farmer], 'potter', 'reaper', 'prophet').<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.2.2. 'Working for another'

People who work may work for another person. For this designation, only the verb form of עבד is used, but נָעַר and its feminine equivalent נַעֲרָה are also used. This use of all three terms is rare.

For עָבַד: see Gen 29:15-20; 30:26; 31:6, 41; Jer 22:13

For נָעַר: see Ruth 2:4-5, 15, 21 and Job 1:15-18.

For נַעֲרָה: see Ruth 2:8-9, 22-23 and 3:2.

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<sup>9</sup> Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Like the use of עָבַד for 'worker', these are participles used as substantives, much like the English *verb + er* to designate the people who do certain tasks (e.g. waiter, farmer, lawyer; and more archaic terms such as scholar and bursar). See Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 201.

This rare use can be explained as the Bible's preference to use these terms to indicate a serving relationship (see Section 4.2.5) rather than 'working' as such for another person. עָבַד in Genesis and Jer 22:13 are in the context of work for pay. The references for נָעַר and נַעֲרָה are the few that use these terms outside of personal service to someone or for fighting men, and refer to agricultural workers.

In the format of this list, the verb עָבַד starts to drop out of use, being used occasionally for slave service (see Section 4.2.3), once for indentured foreign labour (Section 4.2.4), and once in the speech of a high status official (2 Sam 16:19). The only other uses of the verb is its frequent use to denote the worship of deity (see Section 4.2.11.1), and for vassalship and once for the exile of the Israelites. This near-nil use of עָבַד for 'working for another' and absence in nearly all other designations is a further argument against Zimmerli's contention that עָבַד should carry 'belonging' as a primary designation. That is, the noun עָבֵד carries the idea of belonging, not the verb.

In Ruth, the use of first and third person pronominal suffixes for both נָעַר (נַעֲרָיו) and נַעֲרָה (נַעֲרָתִי), and other expressions of possession (לִי [2:21]; הַנַּעֲרִים אֲשֶׁר לִי [2:23]; נַעֲרוֹתָי בְּעָז [2:23]) indicate Boaz's employment of both sexes for harvesting in his field. That is, they work for him. This use of נָעַר is metaphoric, because the primary designation of נָעַר is 'youth/young man'.<sup>11</sup> This use evokes the association 'strength'; associated with youthfulness and the prime of life. The designation of a certain נָעַר as being in charge of the reapers (2:5-6) also anticipates a frequent use for נָעַר in the Bible: someone in the service of another person (see Section 4.2.5.1). In 2:13, נַעֲרָה is replaced by שִׁפְחָה in Ruth's speaking (*I am not one of your [female] servants* [שִׁפְחָתְךָ]). This use of שִׁפְחָה, matched with Ruth's deferential use of שִׁפְחָתְךָ (singular), anticipates Section 4.2.9, the use of slave terms in deferential speech. Ruth's swapping of נַעֲרוֹת for שִׁפְחָתְךָ indicates self abasement, here to express gratitude for Boaz's generosity.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For studies on נָעַר, see e.g., David J.A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993+) 708; van der Ploeg, 'Slavery', 85; Albright, 'Seal of Eliakim', 82; HALOT, 707; Revell, *Designation*, 30; H.F. Fuhs, 'נָעַר, Na'ar, etc', in *TDOT* 9 (1998) 474-485; J. MacDonald, 'The Status and Role of Na'ar in Israelite Society', *JNES* 35 (1976) 147.

<sup>12</sup> C.f. K. Lawson Younger, 'Two Comparative Notes on the Book of Ruth', *JANES* 26 (1998) 127-128. Self-abasement in the context of thanks is discussed in Appendix 1.2

### 4.2.3. Slavery

As discussed in Section 4.1, the use the עֶבֶד word group to designate slave service, slaves and slavery is a second primary designation for the word group. For this designation, the substantive עֶבֶד appears, having as its primary designation, ‘slave’. The designation, ‘to serve as a slave’, which the verb עָבַד carries, becomes in effect a derivation of the designation, ‘working for another’. The same is the case for the substantive עֲבָדָה. Both עֶבֶד and עֲבָדָה are used rarely in the Bible in the context of slavery.

For עֶבֶד as ‘to serve as a slave’: Ex 21:2, 6; Lev 25:39, 40, 46; Dt 15:12.

For עֲבָדָה as ‘slave service’: Lev 25:39 (in the context of debt slavery); Ezra 8:20 (in the context of temple slavery).

For עָבַד as ‘slave’: see e.g. Gen 12:16; 20:14; 30:43; 39:17, 19; 41:12; Ex 12:44; 21:2-7, 20, 26-27, 32; Lev 25:39, 42, 44; Dt 12:12, 18; 15:17; 23:16 [15]; 28:68; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Sam 9:10; 1 Kgs 2:39-40; 2 Kgs 4:1; 5:26; 24:12 (possibly); 1 Chr 2:34-35; 2 Chr 28:10; Job 7:2; Ps 123:2; Prov 17:2; 29:19, 21; 30:22; Eccl. 2:7; 10:7; Isa 24:2; Jer 34:9-16; Joel 3:2 [2:27]; Mal 1:6.

With the appearance of עֶבֶד are the feminine equivalents, אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה, both having as their primary designations, ‘female slave’, often translated as ‘handmaid’ or ‘maidservant’.<sup>13</sup>

For אִמָּה: Gen 30:3; Ex 2:5; 20:10, 17; 21:20-32; 23:12; Lev 25:6, 44; Deut 5:21; 12:12, 18; 15:17; 16:11, 14; 2 Sam 6:20, 22; Ezra 2:65; Neh 7:67; Job 19:15; 31:13; Ps 116:16; Nah 2:8[7]. For the use of this term in the context of slave wives, see Gen 20:17; 21:10-13; 31:33; Ex 21:7-11; 23:12; Judg 9:18; and 19:19.

For שִׁפְחָה, see e.g. Gen 12:16; 16:1-8; 20:14; 24:35; 29:24, 29; 30:43; 32:6[5]; Ex 11:5; Dt 28:68; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Sam 17:17; 2 Kgs 5:26; Esth 7:4; Ps 123:2; Prov 30:23; Eccl 2:7; Isa 24:2; Jer 34:9-16. For the use of this term in the context of slave wives, see Gen 16:2-5; 25:12; 30:4-18; 32:23[22]; 33:1-6; and Lev 19:20.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of possible differences in meaning between אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה, see Appendix 1.1.

<sup>14</sup> Ex 11:5 could be placed here, *the firstborn of the שִׁפְחָה who is behind the handmill*, since a slave woman having children presupposes some slave-wife arrangement. But Moses’ statement forms a merism with *the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne*, to cover all social classes of people in Egypt. Therefore, the use of שִׁפְחָה suits.

Despite having anticipated the use of נַעֲרָה/נַעַר for people in the service of another person, נַעֲרָה/נַעַר is not used in the Bible in clear references to slaves (see Section 4.2.5.1), except maybe in Ex 2:5 where a woman designated with אִמָּה is part of a group of נַעֲרוֹת, who are clearly female attendants of Pharaoh's daughter.

At this point in the list, all uses of the עֶבֶד word group are now metaphoric. As indicated in Section 4.1, each subsequent category of use becomes more metaphoric, defined as increasing movement away from 'work' and 'slave'. Such metaphoricity calls up one or more of the associations of slavery listed in Chapter 3.2: 'possession' (with the derived association, 'control'), 'inferior status', 'work', 'debt/poverty', 'oppression', and 'propensity to run away'.

#### 4.2.4. Indentured labour on ethnic lines

In similar fashion to other ancient societies, slave terms are used for other forms of non-free labour such as such as corvée and indentured labour of various kinds.<sup>15</sup> The primary example of indentured labour in the Bible is that on ethnic lines, used both for Israel in relation to Egypt and other groups in relation to Israel. For this designation, מַס ('forced labour') is also used as a synonym.<sup>16</sup>

For עֶבֶד: Josh 16:10 (Qal participle in conjunction with מַס).

For עֶבֶד: Josh 9:23.

For עֲבֹדָה: Ex 2:23; 6:6 (paralleled with 'burdens'), 9; Dt 26:6.

In the phrase בֵּית עֲבָדִים ('house of slaves') for Israel in Egypt: see, e.g. Ex 20:2; Deut 5:6; 8:14; 13:6 [5]; 11 [10]; Judg 6:8; Mic 6:4.

For מַס: Deut 20:11; Josh 16:10; 17:13; Judg 1:28, 30, 33, 35; 2 Chr 8:8; Isa 31:8.

When Israelites are subjected to corvée by their own leaders, only מַס is used (1 Kgs 5:27[13]; 15:22; Jer 22:13-16).

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<sup>15</sup> Bakir, A.E.-M., *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (ASALE Supp 18; Cairo: De L'Institut Français D'Archéologie Orientale, 1952) 1-9. For Roman use, see J. Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man* (trans., T. Wiedemann; Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1974) 33, citing Plato *Republic*, 590c, d; K.H. Rengstorff, 'Δούλος, κτλ', in *TDNT Vol. 2* (ed. G. Kittel; trans., G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 261; T.E.J. Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery: A Source Book* (London, Baltimore: Routledge, John Hopkins University Press, 1981) 2.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on the two terms and their designations, see D.E. Callender, 'Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings in Israel and the Ancient Near East', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998) 75-78.



In this use of the עבד word group, the association ‘work’ is clearly evoked. But others may also be evoked, such as ‘oppression’ and ‘inferior status’—certainly the case for the portrayal of Israel in Egypt. Generally, indentured people/peoples are powerless to free themselves from it and are treated as second-class citizens.

However, these designations for the עבד word group except for בית עבדים could be interpreted differently. For example, Josh 9:23 and 16:10 could be thought of as vassalship to Israel, and עבדה in Ex 2:23; 6:6, 9 and Dt 26:6 could simply mean ‘work’, as other uses for עבדה in Exodus indicate. Against Josh 9:23 and 16:10 referring to vassalship, the peoples referred to are within the borders of Israel and therefore subject directly to Israel’s leadership, just as Israel was in Egypt, so indentured labour along ethnic lines is the better interpretation. The paralleling of עבדה with סבלת (‘burdens’) in Ex 6:6 and the use of the adjective קשה (‘harsh’) in Ex 6:9 creates a picture more suited to the worst of slave conditions rather than just have עבדה simply denote ‘work’.

#### **4.2.5. People in the service of others**

The use of the עבד word group for people in a serving relationship with another, the most common use of this word group, represents a movement away from ‘slave’ because it usually covers people without reference to legal or social status. Fighting men/soldiers in the Hebrew Bible can be thought to be free people. נערה/נער is used synonymously in this context. I have chosen to differentiate between people in service to the king (covered in Section 4.2.6) and those not, due to the inherent status the former have by their proximity to power.

##### **4.2.5.1. SERVANTS**

The use of the עבד word group for servants in general covers not only slaves (e.g. the עבדים of the patriarchs), but other people who do work for another without reference to legal or social status. The same is the case for נערה/נער.

For עָבָד: see, e.g. Gen 24; 26:15, 19, 25, 32; Judg 6:27; 2 Sam 9:12; 14:30-31; Neh 5:16; Job 19:16; Prov 12:9.

For נָעַר: see, e.g. Gen 22:3-5, 19; Num 22:22; Judg 9:11, 13; 1 Sam 9:5-8; 2 Sam 9:9; 13:17, 28-29; 19:18 [17]; 2 Kgs 4:12, 25, 38; 5:20; 6:15; 8:4; Neh 4:16 [22]; 6:5.

For נערה: Gen 24:61; Ex 2:5; 1 Sam 25:42; Esth 4:4, 16; Prov 9:3; 27:27; 31:15.

For צעירה: Jer 14:3.<sup>17</sup>

עֶבֶד is not used with this designation.

The associations of slavery evoked in this use are ‘work’ and ‘inferior status’. For נערה/נער, the associations of youth that are evoked are ‘strength’ (young men are in the prime of life; hence can do heavy labouring) and ‘inferior status’ (derived from status in the community coming from age and life experience).

That the עבדים of the patriarchs and the עבד of Abraham in Gen 24 are slaves is certain from their lists of property (e.g. Gen 12:16; 20:14; 30:43), which do not mention workers of free status. Other references can also be understood as referring to slaves. For example, 2 Sam 9:9-12, presents a scenario where Ziba has twenty עבדים (v.10) who are differentiated from his sons. Ziba himself is designated as a עבד of Saul (v.3), and is eventually assigned along with his household to be a permanent עבד to Saul’s grandson, Mephibosheth (v.12). Despite the NRSV’s translation of עבד/עבדים as ‘servant/s’, this is a situation where translating עבד as ‘slave’ for both Ziba and his עבדים works perfectly well, and probably should be the translation. In contrast, the NRSV has translated עבדים in 1 Kgs 2:39-40 as ‘slaves’, no doubt because these עבדים ran away. Similarly, in 1 Chr 2:34-35 עבד is translated as ‘slave’, no doubt due to the man’s ethnic status (an Egyptian) and the need for the narrator to elaborate on this man’s marriage to his master’s daughter.

There is a distinction between the use of עבד and נערה/נער. Except for Gen 24, in which the עבד is a man who is in the role of a messenger and manager of Abraham’s property, עבד refers to people who are labouring for their ‘master’. In contrast, נערה/נער is used mostly for people who are in the role of personal service; that is, manservant and maidservant roles. The few uses outside of this use, except for נער designating fighting men (see Section 4.2.5.2), have been covered in Section 4.2.2. Prov 31:15 also has נערה refer to women who do other than provide personal service.

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<sup>17</sup> This term, used only in Jer 14:3 to denote servants, is derived from צער, ‘insignificance’, used mostly for people who are the youngest in comparison to others. Like נער, צעירה plays on ‘insignificance’ when used for ‘servant’, to denote the person’s inferiority in relation to the master.

#### 4.2.5.2. FIGHTING MEN/SOLDIERS

One form of ‘service to another’ is fighting.

For עֶבֶד: see e.g. Gen 14:15; 1 Sam 18:30; 25:10; 2 Sam 2:12-17, 3:22; 11:9,11; 19:7; 21:22; 1 Kgs 20:6; 2 Kgs 1:13; 18:24; 24:10-11; 1 Chr 20:8.

For נֶעֶר: Gen 14:24; Judg 9:54; 1 Sam 14:1, 6; 21:3-6 [2-5]; 25:5-12 (in the role of messengers); 30:17; 2 Sam 2:14, 21; 4:12; 13:34 (watchman); 18:15; 20:11; 1 Kgs 20:14-19; 2 Kgs 19:6; 1 Chr 12: 29[28]; Neh 13:19 (gatekeepers).

The association of slavery evoked is ‘work’. This puts fighting men in roles similar to that of servants in general: labouring for their ‘master’. For נֶעֶר, the association of youth evoked is ‘strength’: fighting men need to be strong, and therefore most are young men.

עֶבֶד and נֶעֶר are synonyms in this context and are sometimes parallel terms (Gen 14:15, 24; 1 Sam 25:5, 27; and 2 Sam 2:12, 14).<sup>18</sup> נֶעֶר referring to fighters without עֶבֶד as a parallel occurs in 1 Sam 30:17 and 1 Chr 12:29[28]. Generally, the actual fighting men are in view, but 2 Sam 11:11; 1 Kgs 20:6; and 2 Kgs 24:10, being references to entire armies, can include military leaders. Revell argues that נֶעֶר refers not to fighters but to junior men such as messengers,<sup>19</sup> an idea that can be supported from Judg 9:54 and 1 Sam 14:1 where נֶעֶר refers to armour bearers, but the parallels with עֶבֶד just noted show that נֶעֶר can have a broader designation, helped also by the specific mention of jobs (2 Sam 13:34; Neh 13:19). 2 Sam 2:14-16 also shows that נֶעֶר can designate actual fighters.<sup>20</sup> It is better to think of נֶעֶר as

<sup>18</sup> See C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, ‘Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State’, in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (eds, V. Fritz, P.R. Davies; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996) 97, 100-101, who draws attention to this fact for 1-2 Sam, but does not always give significance to the occurrence.

<sup>19</sup> E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 33.

<sup>20</sup> Recognised by MacDonald, ‘Status and Role’, 164. However, MacDonald suffers from a number of methodological errors. One, He has assumed from the outset that נֶעֶר refers to high born people, or people of status (drawing a parallel from Ugaritic writing) (pp.148-150). Two, he has set up as part of his thesis the reasonably common view that נֶעֶר solely means ‘young man/youth’ or ‘servant’ (p. 147), and replaces this with an equally restrictive cover-all meaning for נֶעֶר: it means ‘squire’, on analogy with medieval practice (p.170). If he had read Albright, ‘Seal of Eliakim’, and van der Ploeg, ‘Slavery’, he might have argued differently, since both scholars recognise a wide variety of meanings for נֶעֶר. Three, he fits texts to his thesis. For example, in 2 Kgs 4:19-24 נֶעֶר refers both to the Shunammite woman’s son (v.19) and servants (vv.22, 24), but MacDonald assumes the whole family, including the נְעָרִים, are high born, a fact not stated in the text. He assumes the same for the נְעָרִים involved in Samson’s wedding in Judges 13, Saul’s נֶעֶר in 1 Sam 9 (but Saul is not king at this moment in the narrative), Boaz’s נְעָרִים in Ruth 2, and so on. MacDonald recognises the personal attendant role of many נְעָרִים (pp.152-153), but this does not establish his assumption that they are necessarily high-born.

playing on the idea of youth: *Abner said to Joab, “Let the ‘lads’ (נערים) come forward and have a contest before us”* (2 Sam 2:14a); and *‘I will take nothing except what the ‘lads’ (נערים) have eaten’* (Gen 14:24a).

#### 4.2.5.3. CHILDREN TO PARENTS

There is one use of עָבַד in reference to children serving their father: Mal 3:17. This is the only use of עָבַד in the Bible with the general meaning of ‘to serve’. Here, the association of slavery evoked is the derived association from ‘possession’: ‘control’. This relates to the expected subjection and obedience of children to their father, a theme prominent in Proverbs.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.2.6. People in the service of the king

A variation of the idea, ‘people in the service of another’ is ‘people in the service of the king’; that is, courtiers and officials. The associations of slavery evoked have been discussed in Chapter 3.2 and are ‘work’, ‘inferior status’, and two new associations: ‘loyalty’ and ‘status’. As discussed in Chapter 3.2, loyalty is not a conscious association of slavery in the Hebrew Bible, but is nevertheless presupposed by a slave’s expected obedience. ‘Status’ is derived from courtiers and officials’ close proximity to the king and their role as his delegates when carrying on his business. This may map from slaves in wealthy and influential households having a derived status when they conduct business on behalf of their master.<sup>22</sup> Thus the use of עָבַד for these people presents an interesting play on the metaphoricity of the term: they are inferior in status to the king, but yet they have power in the kingdom and influence on the king as advisors and counsellors. Examples of kings who confer with officials are found in 2 Sam 16:20-17:14; 1 Kgs 12:6-11 and 2 Kgs 6:8, 11-12. Courtiers and officials who offer advice to their king are found in 1 Kgs 20:23-25, 31 and Esth 6:3-5 (נער).

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MacDonald has taken the opposite view of Revell, but both he and Revell have interpreted the meaning of נער too narrowly. See also Chapter 3.2, fn. 42.

<sup>21</sup> The Apostle Paul, in Gal 4:1-2, concretises this situation by directly paralleling non-adult children in a wealthy household with slaves: despite their status as heirs of the property, the children *are no better than slaves*, due to being subject to guardians (i.e. told what to do).

<sup>22</sup> Snell, *Life*, 123. It is this phenomenon in Greco-Roman slavery that prompts the debate about the nature of slavery, noted in Chapter 1.1 as an issue in the study of slavery in antiquity.

#### 4.2.6.1. COURTIERIERS IN GENERAL

Slave terms can refer to the entirety of the king's court.

For עֲבָדִים: see e.g. Gen 41:37-38; Judg 3:24; 1 Sam 16:15; 22:6; 28:7; 2 Sam 8:7; 12:18-21; 15:14-18; 1 Kgs 3:15; 10:13; 20:23; 2 Kgs 10:5, 8, 13; 11:17; Esth 3:2-3; Prov 14:35; Jer 21:7; 22:4; 46:26; Ezek 46:17; 1 Sam 28:25 (two men only – see v.8).

For נָעָר: Esth 2:2; 6:3, 5.

It is not always clear whether the whole court or officials/ministers is in view. For example, the NRSV translates עֲבָדִים in Jer 46:26 as 'officers'.

The use of נָעָר in Esther for officials in the Persian court is the only biblical use of נָעָר to refer to courtiers of a king. However, a Hebrew seal inscription dating to the monarchic period in Israel also has נָעָר used for someone in the service of the king.<sup>23</sup> The use of נָעָר for courtiers in the seal inscription and in Esther represents the most metaphorical use of נָעָר: the association of 'strength' attributed to youth has mapped to 'work', which has mapped to 'personal service' (Section 4.2.5.1) which maps to 'confidant'.<sup>24</sup> This is a strong feature of the נָעָרִים in Esther: they offer advice to the Persian king. This raises a question: what rank would such 'confidants' have? Are they personal servants or people with higher rank? Esth 6:3, 5 suggests personal servants, since these men are attending the king at night. They seem to be a different group of men from the סֵרִיסִים of 2:3-15 and 4:4-5.

#### 4.2.6.2. COURTIERIERS WITH RANK: OFFICIALS

The עֲבָדִים word-group can clearly refer to officials:

E.g. Ex 7:28-29 [8:3-4] through to 12:30; 1 Sam 29:3; 2 Sam 10:2-4; 17:20; 1 Kgs 15:18; 2 Kgs 6:8, 11; 22:12.

נָעָר is not used for officials, unless it can be argued that the נָעָרִים of the Persian king in Esther are ranked officials.

<sup>23</sup> W.F. Albright, 'The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preëxilic History of Judah, with Some Observations on Ezekiel', *JBL* 51 (1932) 77-106.

<sup>24</sup> Albright, 'Seal of Eliakim,' 82. In his survey of the biblical use of נָעָר, Albright tends to force the 'confidant' interpretation.

The justification for treating these uses of עֶבֶד as designating officials come from the specific roles some have (e.g. *envoys*: 2 Sam 10:2-4; 1 Kgs 15:18), and the differentiation of Asaiah as עַבְד־הַמֶּלֶךְ from other officials in 1 Kgs 22:12. The NRSV reflects something of the dilemma by translating עֲבָדִים in 2 Kgs 6:8, 11 as ‘officials’, when the context is not exactly clear. It is possible that the עֲבָדִים of Pharaoh (Ex 7:28-12:30) may in fact refer to the whole court, being differentiated from the Egyptian people, but in Ex 10:7 עֲבָדִים criticise Pharaoh’s policy towards Moses, a role officials most likely would only have. Therefore the NRSV is right to translate עֲבָדִים in Ex 7-12 as ‘officials’.

#### 4.2.6.3. COURTIER WITH RANK: HIGH OFFICIALS/MINISTERS

The עֶבֶד word-group also can designate the highest ranked officials.

For עֶבֶד: 2 Sam 16:19.

For עֶבֶד: see, e.g. Gen 41:10; Num 22:18 2 Kgs 11:26; 16:9; 19:5 (see 19:2); 25:8; Jer 36:24, 31.

עֶבֶד in 2 Sam 16:19 is the only use of this verb to denote an official serving his king, but it is in the speech of a character.

נָעַר drops out of use in the Bible for high officials, possibly because the association of ‘youth’ and its frequent use for personal servants are felt to be inappropriate for such high ranking people. That is, their high status in the community overrides the inferiority connoted in personal service and youth.<sup>25</sup>

The leadership and status of high ranking עֲבָדִים is indicated by the occasional use of parallel terms for these people in individual narratives. In Num 22:1-36, for example, עֲבָדִים in v.18 is a parallel term for מַלְאָכִים (‘messengers’; v.5), which is used as an inclusive term for Balak’s שָׂרִים (‘chiefs, princes, officials’; vv.8, 13-14, 15, 21, 36), which in turn includes the designation זִקְנִים (‘elders’; v.7). A similar situation occurs in Jer 36, in which the עֲבָדִים of King Zedekiah (v.24; c.f. v.31) are also designated as שָׂרִים in v. 21. Ringgren et al are right to indicate that שָׂר is a status term (the same is the case for זִקְנִים) and עֶבֶד designates their role when such people are on the king’s business. However they overstate their case when they

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<sup>25</sup> C.f. 1 Kgs 12:6-14 where advice to Rehoboam by young men, designated as יְלָדִים (lit. ‘children’) is contrasted with the advice of older men, designated with זִקְנִים (‘elders’).

argue that עבדים and שרים refer to two separate groups of officials in the Israelite monarchy.<sup>26</sup> The one group of people are referred to in Jer 36:21, 24, which is also the case in Num 22 for Balak's court, as just noted. 2 Kgs 19:2 also indicates that the עבדים of Hezekiah in v.5 refer to named and titled high officials and includes priests, and 2 Kgs 19:6 also uses עבדים for the Assyrian high officials whose titles are given in 18:17.

#### **4.2.7. Subjection to the king/state**

At this point in the list, the categorisation of the metaphoric use of slave terms moves away from formal work relations to what could be termed informal relationships. Obviously subjects who are not employed by their king still has a 'formal' relationship with their sovereign, but it is 'informal' in that they do not directly work for or serve the king. The same is the case for vassals, though as will be shown in Section 4.2.8, biblical writers viewed vassalship as qualitatively the same as slavery.

The slave terms used for subjects in relation to the king are:

For עֶבֶד: Judg 9:28; 1 Kgs 12:4; Jer 30:9.

For עֶבֶד in the Israelite setting: 1 Sam 29:10; 1 Kgs 20:6; 2 Kgs 10:5; 1 Chr 21:3.

For עֶבֶד to refer to the subjects of foreign kings: 2 Chr 2:8; 8:18; Gen 21:25; and 1 Sam 27:12 (David's relationship with King Achish of Gath).

For עבודה/עבדה: 1 Kgs 12:4 // 2 Chr 10:4; 1 Chr 26:30; and Neh 5:18.

As discussed in Chapter 3.2, the associations of slavery evoked are 'work', 'inferior status', and the derived association, 'loyalty'. Subjects are expected to be loyal to the king. 'Work' relates to taxes (work in kind) and subjection to direct forms of labour such as the corvée (c.f. 1 Kgs 5:13-16; 15:22) and periodic military duty (c.f. 1 Chr 27:1-15).

As also noted in Chapter 3.2, this use of the עבד word group is rare. That is, the biblical writers did not normally picture the Israelite subject-king relationship in terms of slave to master. This is in keeping with the wider ANE. It seems that in both ancient Israel and in the wider ancient Near East, the metaphoric use of slave terms in relation to the king was mostly confined to the king's courtiers and officials and others in his direct employ. The potential

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<sup>26</sup> Ringgren et al, 'עֶבֶד,' 391.

effect this has on what associations slave terms call up when used in relation to God is discussed in Chapter 10.2.

עבדה/עבדה designates in a general fashion the taxes and other obligations to the king by his subjects, except in 1 Chr 26:30, in which עבדה refers to the administrative work of certain officials on behalf of the king. The use of עבדה in 1 Kgs 12:4 // 2 Chr 10:4 will also refer to the Israelite corvée labour mentioned in 1 Kgs 5:13-16. עבדה in Neh 5:18 refers to taxes for the Persian king, along with a famine (v.3), as well as Nehemiah's daily food provision for his staff and foreign dignitaries (vv.14-19).

#### **4.2.8. Vassals to an overlord**

##### **4.2.8.1. VASSALSHIP**

For vassalage, the terms used are:

For עָבַד: Gen 14:4; Deut 28:48; 1 Sam 17:9; 2 Kgs 18:7; 25:24; Jer 25:11, 14; 27:7-17; 28:14; 40:9.

For עֲבָדָה: 1 Sam 17:9; 2 Sam 8:2, 6, 14; 2 Kgs 17:3; 24:1; 2 Chr 12:8; Ezra 9:9; Neh 9:36; c.f. Gen 9:25-27.

For עבדה/עבדה: see 2 Chr 12:8; Ezra 9:8-9.

The associations of slavery evoked and their ramifications are discussed in Chapter 3.2. Most associations of slavery are evoked: 'work', 'inferior status', the derived association 'loyalty', 'oppression' and 'possession'. That so many are evoked suggests biblical writers viewed vassalship little different from slavery. The vassal nation pays taxes and tribute and is subject to corvée and military labour requirements ('work'). Loyalty to the suzerain is expected. 'Oppression' is a key association because of the difficulty of the vassal to free themselves from vassalship.<sup>27</sup> 'Possession' is sometimes used as rhetoric by vassals to encourage the suzerain to assist them, playing on the idea of 'protect your possession'.

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<sup>27</sup> This is highlighted in Israel/Judah's case in Nadav Na'aman, 'The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers', *JSOT* 65 (1995) 37-53, who focuses on 2 Kgs. Isa 28-35 is more positive about vassalship for the sake of the people's survival.



#### 4.2.8.2. ISRAEL IN EXILE

A particularly oppressive form of vassalship occurs when a suzerain removes a whole population to another land as punishment for rebellion. This permits monitoring of the subject people, provision of taxes and labour for a depopulated or unpopulated area, breaking the spirit of the subject people (they are taken away from their land), and the possibility that they will assimilate to the overlord nation's culture and religion (i.e. cultural and religious genocide may occur).

For Israel, the terms used are:

For עֶבֶד: Jer 30:8.

For עֶבֶד: 2 Chr 36:20.

For עֶבֶד/עֶבְדָּה: Isa 14:3; Lam 1:3.

Jer 30:8 could be understood to be a general reference to vassalship, but the context is that of the exile (vv.3, 10-11).

For this use of the עֶבֶד word-group, all associations of slavery discussed for vassalship in general (Section 4.2.8.1) are evoked. However, the most salient association is 'oppression'. It maps to the uprooting of the people and a particularly shameful form of powerlessness: the nation has been unable to remain within its territory. The rare use of slave terms for Judah's exile indicates the biblical writers viewed it mostly as punishment rather than as a form of vassalship. However, the two ideas are joined in Isa 50:1 where the image of debt-slavery is evoked: servitude is the punishment.

#### 4.2.9. Deference

As has been noted in Chapter 3.2, deference is a form of speech in which the speaker humbles and/or abases himself and portrays the hearer as being of a higher status than him. The main features of the use of slave terms in deference and the associations evoked have also been described in Chapter 3.2. Deference is a form of speech to which politeness theory can analyse, as is done in chapters 5-7. The importance of the use of slave terms in deference is that they indicate something of how ancient Israelites conceived of themselves in relation to

others and deity. As concluded in Chapter 3.2, the use of slave terms in deference reflects a hierarchical society, and in all cases call up the association of slavery, ‘inferior status’.

The use of slave terms in deference, or master-slave deference, varies. This cannot be factored into the list, but what variations imply is discussed in Chapters 5-9. Generally, master-slave deference is usually given to a social superior (but sometimes not), and there are also a few cases where social equals and inferiors are addressed with deferential language. The fullest form of master-slave deference is אדני-עבדך (‘my lord’-‘your servant’) for a male speaker (though sometimes עבדו is used for increased politeness); and אדני-אמתך\שפחתך for a female speaker. In both cases, the third person pronominal suffix may be used by the speaker for increased politeness. אני-עבדך (‘My lord-I’) is frequent in biblical narrative, as is the case in ancient Near Eastern letters. In Psalms, when master-slave deference is used, God is usually addressed in the second person or by name. Within longer speeches in narrative, the use of deference can also vary. Such variation within a speech invites discussion as to why it occurs, which has not been done yet for ancient Near Eastern literature, including biblical texts, noted in Chapter 5.3. One of the purposes of Chapters 5-7 is to address this issue.

I have chosen to categorise deference firstly on function, then relative status, which prepares for my analyses in Chapters 5-8 on how the slave terms in deference are being used, particularly in the matter of identity construction. In my list, I have treated אמה and שפחה as having the same function in deference. The possibility that they may have different functions is addressed as an excursus (see Appendix 1.1).

Deference to God/deity is covered in Section 4.2.12.

#### **4.2.9.1. DEFERENCE IN SUPPLICATION**

##### **4.2.9.1.1. To social superiors**

The most frequent use of master-slave deference is when a person requests something from a recognised social superior.

For עבדך, see, e.g. Gen 44:18-34; 46:34; 47:3-4; 50:17; 1 Sam 20:7; 25:8; 2 Sam 13:24; 15:8; 19:19-20; 1 Kgs 1:17; 20:39-40; 2 Kgs 4:2; 6:3.

For אמה: Ruth 3:9.

For שפחה: 1 Sam 28:21-22; 2 Sam 14:4-7.

An extra-biblical and non-literary example is provided by the Mešad Ḥashavyahu plea.<sup>28</sup>

The association of slavery evoked ‘inferior status’. The speaker recognises that the hearer has the power to grant or not grant the request. As will be seen from the references listed for other categories of master-slave deference listed below, requesting is something is the main context for the use of this type of deference. As noted in Chapter 3.2, context will also determine whether other associations of slavery are evoked. ‘Loyalty’ is sometimes appealed to or implied.

#### **4.2.9.1.2. To social equals or inferiors**

A particularly interesting use of master-slave deference is found in those narratives where a character defers to another who is not a recognised social superior.

For עָבָד: Gen 18:3; 19:2;<sup>29</sup> 32:5[4]; 33:4-16; 1 Kgs 20:32.

For אָמָה and שפחה as parallel terms: 1 Sam 25:24-31.

Here, the association of slavery evoked is ‘inferior status’, and for the same reason as when requests are made to recognised social superiors: the hearer has the power to grant or not grant the request. The few references indicate that master-slave deference to social equals is unusual. The context is important for this use of master-slave deference. All occurrences are discussed in Chapters 6.2 and 7, except 1 Kgs 20:32 (Ben-hadad, king of Aram, sues for mercy from King Ahab of Israel after he has been defeated). In this use, significant identity construction takes place.

#### **4.2.9.2. DEFERENCE IN SELF-DEFENCE AFTER ACCUSATION**

Master-slave deference is used when characters in narratives defend themselves in response to criticism by a social superior.

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<sup>28</sup> For text and discussion, see Dennis Pardee, ‘The Judicial Plea from Mešad Ḥashavyahu (Yavneh Yam): A New Philological Study’, *Maarav* 1 (1978) 35; and Josef Naveh, ‘A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C.’, *IEJ* 10 (1960) 129-139.

<sup>29</sup> For the problem of visitors’ relative social status to Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18-19, see Chapter 7.2.2.4.

For עֶבֶד: see e.g. Gen 42:10-13; 44:7-9; 1 Sam 29:8 (also Lachish 3 – see Chapter 5.3).

For אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה as parallel terms: 1 Sam 1:16, 18.

Once again, the association of slavery evoked is ‘inferior status’. In all cases, the hearer is a social superior. As for master-slave deference to social equals, identity construction takes place, usually of the form, the speaker takes the role of an unjustly accused innocent person.

#### **4.2.9.3. DEFERENCE IN CRITIQUE OF THE HEARER**

A related context to self-defence is the use of master-slave deference when the hearer, a social superior, is critiqued.

For עֶבֶד: 1 Kgs 1:26 (the prophet Nathan criticises King David). See also Lachish 6 (see Chapter 5.3).

For אִמָּה: 2 Sam 20:17 (a wise woman criticises Joab for his attack on her city).

For שִׁפְחָה: 2 Kgs 4:16 (disbelief by the Shunammite woman at Elisha’s prophecy that she will give birth to a child).

For אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה as parallel terms: 2 Sam 14:12-17 (a ‘wise woman’, prompted by Joab, criticises King David).

Critiquing a superior hearer is similar to giving a request: the hearer has the power to accept the critique or reject it. If the latter, the speaker can expect negative consequences (except maybe 2 Kgs 4:16), shown as happening to others in 2 Chr 16:7-10; 18:25-26 (// 1 Kgs 22:26-27); 24:20-22. Taking the role of inferior recognises the power the hearer has over them.<sup>30</sup>

#### **4.2.9.4. DEFERENCE IN THANKS**

On the positive side, master-slave deference can occur in thanks.

For עֶבֶד: 2 Sam 9:8; 14:22; 2 Kgs 8:13

For שִׁפְחָה: Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam 1:18.

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<sup>30</sup> Two noteworthy examples of the lack of master-slave deference when critiquing a hearer is Joab’s criticism of King David in 2 Sam 3:24-25 and 19:5-7. As the narrative is written, it can be argued that David’s inability to control Joab permits Joab to do this: he has power over David (he leads the army).

As with the other uses of master-slave deference, the association of slavery evoked is ‘inferior status’. This association can move beyond the lexicalised with the addition of extra self-abasement, to make the total deference extreme: the speaker widens the relative status with the hearer. In 2 Sam 9:8 and in 2 Kgs 8:13, כלב (‘dog’) is used to emphasise unworthiness. This also occurs in the extra-biblical Lachish 2, 5, and 6 (see Chapter 5.3). Ruth emphasises her foreign status in Ruth 2:13; again, a tactic of claiming unworthiness. Self-abasement in the context of thanks is explored more fully in Appendix 1.2.

#### **4.2.9.5. EXPECTED DEFERENCE**

The use of master-slave deference just listed forms part of expected politeness, except for between social equals. As the few references listed below indicate, the use of master-slave deference without a clear context (request, self-defence, critique) is rare, but it is certainly customary language when people interact with social superiors. This shows that deferential language is normally used for a purpose. In all cases, the association with slavery evoked is ‘inferior status’.

##### **4.2.9.5.1. To social superiors**

Master-slave deference as expected politeness is found in Gen 43:28; 1 Sam 28:2; and 2 Sam 15:2.

The contexts are people interacting with a high official (Gen 43:28 – Joseph as a senior Egyptian official), a prince in the role of a judge (2 Sam 15:2), and a king (1 Sam 28:2).

##### **4.2.9.5.2. To social equals**

That master-slave deference can be used to social equals occurs in Judg 19:19; 1 Kgs 20:9.

Judg 19:19 is a situation of hospitality, but unlike in Gen 18:3 and 19:2, the speaker is the stranger who should be offered hospitality. His deference is in response to a question, and represents both an implied request for lodging and at the same time a mitigation of that request by stating that he and those with him will not be a burden to whoever grants him

lodging (see also Chapter 7).<sup>31</sup> 1 Kgs 20:9 is King Ahab to his equal, King Ben-Hadad of Aram, but Ben-Hadad has invaded Israel and put Samaria under siege.<sup>32</sup> Both situations work on the fact that the hearer has power over the speaker: the hearer in Judg 19:19 could withhold hospitality and Ben-Hadad is militarily superior to Ahab.

#### **4.2.10. Religious rituals and rites**

From this point, the use of slave terms in relation to God is listed. The rationale for placing the categories listed below in this part of the list has been given in Section 4.1.

The term עבודה/עבדה is occasionally used outside of the work of the tabernacle/temple staff to denote both a specific rite (Ex 12:25-26; 13:5 – the Passover) or the whole sacrificial system or ‘cultus’ (2 Chr 29:35; 35:10, 16).

The association of slavery evoked is ‘work’. Worshippers ‘work’ for God by fulfilling their religious obligations. ‘Debt/poverty’ is also evoked, but positively: many of the rites are for forgiveness. That is, an unrepayable debt is ‘owed’ to God, and only God can waive it – given when the rites are observed. Thus, like for master-slave deference in supplication, power is involved: the rites can be understood as requests for forgiveness or blessing, which only God has the power to grant.

#### **4.2.11. Servant of God**

The use of slave terms in relation to God also touches on a topic mentioned briefly in Chapter 3.3 and Section 4.2.7: the frequent portrayal of God as king in the Hebrew Bible and the frequent use of slave terms in connection with the king may call up associations from the court, not slavery. For example, ritual and sacrifice (section 4.2.10) could be considered as ‘tax’. The tithe certainly is a tax. This matter is dealt with fully in Chapter 10.2, but Chapter

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<sup>31</sup> These two ‘strategies’ are analysed by politeness theory as ‘off record’ (the request is not stated as a request), and ‘minimise the imposition’. See Chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>32</sup> I can use ‘equal’, because when the military situation is reversed, it is Ben-hadad who uses master-slave deference to Ahab (1 Kgs 20:34), as noted in Section 4.2.9.1.2. Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1993) 175-176, who argues that the use of עבדך in 1 Kgs 20:9 is the language of vassalage does not comment on the reversal in 20:32.

8.2.1 notes that when the metaphoricity of עֶבֶד in deference to God in prayer is played upon, it always calls up slavery, rather than service to the king.

The associations of slavery evoked in each category of use of slave terms vary.

#### 4.2.11.1. ISRAEL AS A NATION

Israel as a nation is frequently both designated as ‘serving’ (עֹבֵד) God and is the ‘servant’ (עֶבֶד) of God.

For עֹבֵד: see e.g. Ex 3:12; 7:16; 10:26; 23:25; Deut 10:12; Josh 24:15; 1 Sam 12:24; 2 Chr 12:8; Ps 18:44 [43]; 100:2; Jer 30:9; Ezek 20:40.

For עֶבֶד: see e.g. 1 Kgs 8:32, 36 // 2 Chr 6:23, 27; Neh 1:6, 10; Ps 136:22; Isa 41:8-9; 42:19 (implied); 43:10; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27-28.

Likewise, when Israel worships other gods, the nation is also designated as ‘serving’ (עֹבֵד) these gods.

For עֹבֵד: see e.g. Deut 4:19; 7:4; etc; Judg 2-3; Josh 24:16; 1 Kgs 16:31; 2 Kgs 17; Ps 97:7; 106:36; Jer 11:10.

The noun עֶבֶד is not used; that is, Israel is never denoted in the Bible as a ‘servant’ of the other gods.

The portrayal of Israel as a עֶבֶד of God is in keeping with the wider ancient Near East: most peoples understood their nation to be a servant of one or more deities. This is discussed in Chapters 8.2.1 and 9.2.1.<sup>33</sup>

One key association of slavery evoked is ‘work’, due to the rites, rituals and offerings covered by עֹבֵד being in effect work in kind. ‘Possession’ is also evoked, helped by texts such as Ex 19:5 in which Israel is designated as God’s סִגְלָה (‘treasured possession’), and other texts in which slavery (Jer 2:20) or vassalship (Jer 30:9; 2 Chr 12:8) are used as the opposite to serving God. This feature is noted in some discussions on the practice of slavery as portrayed in the Bible<sup>34</sup> and is discussed further in Chapter 8.2.1. As has just been noted, Israel is never designated as the ‘servant’ of other gods; that is, the ‘possession’ association of slavery maps

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 9.2.1, fns 19, 39-41 for texts.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. Callender, ‘Servant(s),’ 67-83.

solely to Israel's relationship with God. That is, Israel as a nation can never remove itself from its relationship to God.<sup>35</sup> In many respects, the covenant formula, 'They will be my people and I will be their God' also expresses ownership. Thus, despite 'king' being a key and frequent metaphor for God, 'slave' as a metaphor is not forgotten. The derived association 'loyalty' is also evoked, due to the expectation that Israel will 'serve' God and provision of punishment when they did not.

#### 4.2.11.2. PEOPLE IN GENERAL

As Israel as a nation 'serves' and is the 'servant' of God, so do and are the individual people of Israel.

For עֶבֶד: 2 Sam 15:8.

For עֶבֶד: see e.g. Isa 54:17; 56:6; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15; Pss 113:1; 134:1; 135:1.

For Aramaic עֶבֶד: Ezra 5:11.

This use of the עֶבֶד word group in relation to God calls up the same associations indicated in Section 4.2.11.1 for Israel: 'work', 'possession' and 'loyalty'. Essentially, the 'servant of God' concept is individualised, and applied to those of Israel who faithfully worship God.

The references cover a wide context. Ezra 5:11 refers to the returned exiles who are rebuilding the temple. 2 Sam 15:8 refers to an individual who does a specific act of worship (v.12). But the setting is ironic: the individual is Absalom and he uses his worship as a cover to start a rebellion against King David, his father. Isa 54:17 and 65:8-15 refer to worshippers or a group of worshippers of YHWH in contrast to those or a group in Israel who do not worship YHWH (see Chapter 9.2.5). Isa 56:6 refers to foreigners who worship YHWH. Pss 113:1; 134:1 and 135:1 are usually understood to refer to the worshipping congregation whenever these psalms are sung (see Chapter 8.2.1).

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<sup>35</sup> Callender, 'Servant(s),' 79-80.



### 4.2.11.3. SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE

From individuals as being designated עֶבֶד of God is the idea of significant people being designated as עֶבֶד of God. In all cases, the substantive עֶבֶד is used. I have classified the people so designated into three groups, showing both increased significance, yet also a reduction in the metaphoricity of the use of עֶבֶד to designate them.

#### 4.2.11.3.1. Significant individuals

‘Significant individuals’ refers to named people in the Bible to whom עֶבֶד is applied, but are themselves little more than worshippers of God. The two best cases are the patriarchs (see e.g. Deut 9:27; Ps 105:6, 42; Ezek 28:25; 37:25) and Job (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7-8). Despite the significance of the Patriarchs in the portrayal of Israel’s early history and for Israel’s identity, the narratives in Genesis portray them as faithful worshippers of and obedient to God, despite their faults. Job is the same, and the Book that bears his name plays on his being portrayed as a flawless worshipper of God. Presumably the official Eliakim, who is also described as God’s עֶבֶד (Isa 22:20) and is the subject of a favourable prophecy (Isa 22:21-24), was a faithful worshipper of God. Caleb is also worthy of the title as God’s עֶבֶד (Num 14:24) for his belief that God will help Israel defeat the Canaanites (vv.6-9).<sup>36</sup> For these people, the associations of slavery evoked are ‘work’ and ‘loyalty’.

#### 4.2.11.3.2. Kings

A particular type of significant individual is the Israelite king. However, only David and Hezekiah have עֶבֶד applied to them to designate them as God’s ‘servant’.

For David: see e.g. 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5 // 1 Chr 17:4; 1 Kgs 3:6; 8:24, 66; 11:13, 32-34; 14:8; 2 Kgs 8:19; 19:34 // Isa 37:35; 2 Kgs 20:6; Ps 18:1 [title]; 36:1 [title]; 132:10; 78:70; 89:4[3]; Jer 33:21-26; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25.

For Hezekiah: 2 Chr 32:16

The Bible clearly portrays David as the paradigm for all other kings, no doubt because of the portrayal that he was obedient to God (1 Kgs 11:34; 14:8; see Chapter 9.2.2). The use of the

<sup>36</sup> A number of scholars would view Caleb as being in the tradition of Moses. See Section 4.2.11.3.3 below.

term for Hezekiah is also because of Chronicles' similar portrayal of Hezekiah. The associations of slavery that are evoked are, like for individuals and significant individuals, 'work' and 'loyalty', due to the kings' role of rulership and particularly to promote the worship of YHWH. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.2.2.

#### **4.2.11.3.3. People with special roles**

There are a number of significant people in the Bible who are in leadership positions and who are not kings, but are also designated as God's עֲבָדֵי. Moses is the best known example, but there are a number of others.

Moses: e.g. Num 12:7; Deut 34:5; Josh 1; 1 Kgs 8:53, 56; 2 Kgs 18:12; 21:8; Neh 1:7-8; 9:14; 10:30[29]; Ps 105:26; Dan 9:11; Mal 4:4.

Joshua: Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8.

Zerubbabel: Hag 2:23.

Eliakim, a high official: Isa 22:20.

A foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar: Jer 25:9; 43:10.

The association of slavery that is evoked for all five men is 'work'. Nebuchadnezzar 'works' for God by punishing unfaithful-to-God Israel. Eliakim fulfils the role of a high official. Joshua and Moses lead Israel, and like the later kings, promote the worship of YHWH. Thus, for them, the derived association of slavery, 'loyalty', is also evoked. The use of עֲבָדֵי for Moses, however, goes beyond the lexical in Num 12:7. Here, a description of him draws directly upon the imagery of a household manager, or head servant/slave; that is, mapping directly from slavery to his status and role.<sup>37</sup> Fuller discussion is given in Chapter 9.2.2. In many respects, all five men act as God's workers.

#### **4.2.11.3.4. Prophets**

In a similar fashion to people with special roles, prophets are also designated as God's עֲבָדֵי because of their unique function as God's messengers and spokesmen.

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<sup>37</sup> This taken up and played upon in the New Testament; see Heb 3:1-6.

General designation for prophets: 2 Kgs 9:7; 17:13, 23; 21:10; 24:2; Isa 44:26 (implied); Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezek 38:17; Dan 9:6; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6.

Ahijah: 1 Kgs 14:18; 15:29.

Elijah: 1 Kgs 18:36; 2 Kgs 9:36; 10:10.

Jonah: 2 Kgs 14:25.

Isaiah: Isa 20:3.

The use of עֲבָד as a designation for prophets is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.2.3. It is enough to say for the moment that, in comparison to other people listed in Section 4.2.11.3.3, the role of a prophet is even more specialised, being that of spokesperson. The associations of slavery evoked are ‘work’ and ‘loyalty’.<sup>38</sup> Prophets essentially act as messengers (c.f. Gen 24; 2 Sam 17:17; Prov 9:3 for slave messengers; 2 Sam 10:1-5 for envoys of a king), and fulfil their duties. Suffering persecution highlights their loyalty to God. ‘Possession’ is also evoked in 2 Kgs 9:7 in that God will exact revenge for their deaths. That is, the master seeks restitution or retribution for the loss of his property. However, the idea of the master is obligated to care for the slave is not a strong aspect of biblical nor ancient Near Eastern practices of slavery.<sup>39</sup> Like for an official of the king, the prophet has status in the community because of his association with God, though this could be tenuous at times.

Even though the Bible mentions female prophets (e.g. Deborah [Judg 4-5]; Huldah [2 Kgs 22:14-20]), their infrequent mention results in a lack of ‘servant of God’ applied to them, hence my discussion on their designation has been centred on עֲבָד. It is reasonable to assume that whatever is discussed for male prophets applies to female prophets also.

#### 4.2.11.3.5. The ‘Servant’ of Isa 40-55

The enigmatic ‘servant’ figure of Isa 40-55, designated as YHWH’s עֲבָד in Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12, has occasioned a massive amount of study and discussion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> C.f. Ringgren et al, ‘עֲבָד,’ 395: ‘A true prophet and a true *‘ebed* YHWH does everything at the bidding of his God.’

<sup>39</sup> I have not discussed this in Chapter 3.2.1, and Bakir, Mendelsohn and Snell do not deal with this either.

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 9.2.4, fn.58 for representative studies.

It is not my intention here to enter into debate on the identity of the ‘servant’,<sup>41</sup> nor the nuances of this person’s role, but simply to indicate that this ‘servant’ is cast in the role of a prophet, and represents the fullest expression of the persecuted prophet.<sup>42</sup> The references to the ‘servant’s’ appointment, role as messenger, and obedience to YHWH (Isa 42:1; 49:1-6; 50:4-5) makes the metaphoricity of this person’s designation as עֶבֶד at the same level as for other prophets, but more clearly shown. As for all prophets, the ‘servant’ is cast as a messenger-slave, with God dealing with the situation of people abusing his ‘property’. Fuller discussion is given in Chapter 9.2.4. The associations evoked with the use of עֶבֶד are ‘work’, ‘loyalty’ and ‘possession’.

#### 4.2.12. Deference to God

The use of master-slave deference to God portrays God as a Person who can hear and speak and is concerned about ‘face’ and honour as people are, and therefore the expected deference given to social superiors is applied to God. Generally, אֲדֹנִי-אֱנִי deference is used, similar to deference to human superiors, but when עֶבֶד (or אִמָּתְךָ for Hannah in 1 Sam 1:11) is used by a supplicant or by the voice in a psalm, God is addressed in the second person or by name. But this use of עֶבֶד does not completely replace the first person ‘I’. There are also prayers in which God is addressed by name or by אֱלֹהִים and no master-slave terms used (e.g. Ezra 9, Neh 9, Jeremiah’s prayers, some prayer/lament psalms). This variation in language is discussed in Chapter 7 (Genesis), and Chapter 8.2.1 (Psalms) and 8.3 (other prayers), but it is enough to say that in prayer there is a sense of directness and intimacy with God that is not found in interaction between humans in biblical narrative. There is also identity construction: deference (and other language) is used to motivate God to answer any requests or simply respond favourably to the prayer.

As for the categories of deference to humans listed in Section 4.2.9, I have categorised deference to God in the contexts of supplication, thanks, and self-defence and critique, to

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<sup>41</sup> The debate is compounded by the identification in Isa 49:1-7 of the ‘servant’ with ‘Israel’ (v.3), yet separate from ‘Israel’ (vv.5-6).

<sup>42</sup> T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (The Biblical Seminar; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 165-166, 174. See also E. Ben Zvi, ‘“The Prophets” - References to Generic Prophets and their Role in the Construction of the Image of the “Prophets of Old” within the Postmonarchic Readerships/s of the Book of the Kings’, *ZAW* 116 (2004) 555-567, who focuses on the suffering of the prophets as portrayed in 1-2 Kgs.

indicate that master-slave deference to God is used for specific purposes, not only as conventional language.

#### 4.2.12.1. DEFERENCE IN SUPPLICATION

Supplication to God is one of the most common reasons for prayer.

For עָבַד, see e.g. Gen 19:19; 32:11 [10]; 1 Sam 14:41; 23:10-11; 2 Sam 24:10; 1 Kgs 3:6-9; 8:22-30, 52, 59 // 2 Chr 6:14-21; Neh 1:6, 11; Dan 9:17; and many times in Psalms (e.g. 19:12[11]; 27:9; 69:18-19[17-18]; 79:10; 86:2-4; 90:16-17; 143:10), especially in Ps 119 (13 times)

For אָמַח: 1 Sam 1:11.

The use of אָמַח in 1 Sam 1:11 is discussed in Appendix 1.1.

The associations of slavery evoked are discussed in Chapter 3.2, and discussed further in Chapters 8.2.1 and 8.3. The association of slavery, ‘inferior status’, is always evoked. As is discussed in Chapter 8.2.1, the derived association ‘loyalty’ is evoked in Psalms, frequently moving beyond the lexicalised, due to the use of עָבַד as deference solely in connection with expressions of loyalty and obedience to YHWH. ‘Debt/poverty’ is evoked in Gen 32:11 [10], 2 Sam 24:10, 1 Kgs 3:7-9, Neh 1:6, 11 and Dan 9:17, in which identities of unworthiness and repentance are created. ‘Possession’ is evoked in Pss 86:16 and 143:12 to assist the appeal for God’s favourable response.

#### 4.2.12.2. DEFERENCE IN THANKSGIVING

Giving thanks to God is also a common reason for prayer. The use of עָבַד in this context, however, is rare, found only in 2 Sam 7:18-29 (10x) and Ps 116:16.

The association of slavery evoked is ‘inferior status’. Similarly for deference to humans in the context of thanks, this association can move beyond the lexicalised with the addition of extra self-abasement, to widen the relative status between worshipper and God. In Ps 116:16, this is done with אָנִי עֶבֶדְךָ בְּיָדְךָ אֲמַתְךָ (*I am your servant, the child of your serving girl*; v.16b) in parallel to אָנִי עֶבֶדְךָ (*I am your servant*; v.16a). In 2 Sam 7:18-29, it is done with the introductory

question, *Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?* (v.18). Self-abasement in the context of thanks is discussed in Appendix 1.2.

#### 4.2.12.3. DEFERENCE IN SELF-DEFENCE/CRITIQUE OF GOD

There are a number of occasions in the Bible in which a worshipper expresses disappointment to, or criticism of, God, or gives self-defence. As for the context of thanks, the use of עָבַד is rare, found only in Ex 4:10; Num 11:11; Judg 15:18; and Dan 10:17 (to an angel).

The association of slavery always evoked is ‘inferior status’, as for all occurrences of master-slave deference. Here, as for critiquing social superiors (Section 4.2.9.3), the deference softens the critique or self-defence, as well as showing the worshipper is aware God may not accept the critique or self-defence.

#### 4.3. SUMMARY

Table 3 presents the list of the uses of the עָבַד word group in the Hebrew Bible are, along with the associations of slavery evoked.

**Table 3: List of the uses of the עָבַד word group with associations of slavery evoked**

| Category   | Associations of slavery evoked  |
|--|---|
| Work/labour<br>Working/labouring (includes duties of<br>tabernacle/temple staff)<br>Worker/labourer<br>Working for another<br>Slavery<br>Indentured labour | work  |
| People in the service of another<br>Servants<br>Fighting men/soldiers<br>Children to parents   | work, inferior status<br>work<br>control (derived from ‘possession’)  |
| People in the service of the king<br>Courtiers<br>Officials<br>High/senior officials<br>People as subject to the king<br>Vassals<br>Vassals                | work, inferior status, loyalty, status<br>work, inferior status, loyalty, status<br>work, inferior status, loyalty, status<br>work, inferior status, loyalty<br>work, inferior status, loyalty, oppression, |

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|   |   |
|---|---|
| Israel in exile   | possession<br>oppression (the key association), work,<br>inferior status, loyalty, possession   |
| Deference<br>In supplication<br>To social superiors<br>To social equals or inferiors<br>In self-defence<br>In critique<br>In thanks<br>Expected deference<br>To social superiors<br>To social equals                      | inferior status, loyalty (context dependent)<br>inferior status<br>inferior status<br>inferior status<br>inferior status (strongly present)<br><br>inferior status<br>inferior status   |
| Religious ritual and rites<br>Servant of God<br>Israel as a nation<br>People in general<br>Significant persons<br>Significant individuals<br>Kings<br>People with special roles<br>Prophets<br>The 'Servant' of Isa 40-55 | work, debt/poverty<br><br>work, possession, loyalty<br>work, possession, loyalty<br><br>work, loyalty<br>work, loyalty<br>work, loyalty (context dependent)<br>work, loyalty, possession (context dependent)<br>work, loyalty, possession |
| Deference to God<br>Supplication<br><br><br>Thanks<br>Self-defence/critique of God  | inferior status, loyalty (context dependent),<br>debt/poverty (context dependent), possession<br>(context dependent)<br><br>inferior status<br>inferior status  |

Now that all the (i.e. types of) metaphorical uses of slave terms have been listed, study can now be undertaken on how metaphoricity works in given contexts. As has been indicated earlier, focus will be on deference. Before this is done, politeness theory is tested, first using Num 20:14-21 as a general test case, then using the Lachish letters, which contain master-slave deference. The latter not only test politeness theory's suitability as a heuristic tool for deferential address, including when it varies, but also to show the need of taking subject matter in communication into account when analysing language, something yet to be considered seriously in scholarship on language patterns in antiquity. As is argued in chapters 5-7, language use, including deference and other polite address, varies on the basis of subject matter, even in the one speech.

#### 4.4. ADDENDUM: THE USE OF אָדוֹן AND PIEL STEM OF שָׂרַת

As mentioned in Section 4.1, a listing of representative references for אָדוֹן is given, along with שָׂרַת, a synonym of the verb form of עָבַד, to provide the opportunity to compare and to contrast the use of these terms with the עָבַד word group. The frequent use of אָדוֹן in the Hebrew Bible means that the references listed below are representative, not exhaustive, in a number of categories.

##### 4.4.1. The use of אָדוֹן

Owner/master:

Owner of land/possessions:

1 Kgs 16:24

Slave owner:

Gen 39:2-8, 16, 19-20 (Potiphar); 40:7; Ex 21:4-8, 32; Dt 23:16[15]; Judg 19:26-27 (master-husband); 1 Sam 25:10 (implied); 30:13, 15; Job 3:19; Ps 123:2

Master/employer of a servant:

Gen 24 (the עָבַד in this narrative is probably a slave); 44:5; Judg 19:11-12; 1 Sam 20:38; 25:14, 17 (one of Nabal's נַעֲרִים speaking about him); 2 Sam 9:9-10 and 16:3 (King Saul as slave owner?); 2 Kgs 2:3, 5, 16; 5:22, 26; Prov 25:13 (sender of messengers); 27:18; 30:10 (slave owner?); Mal 1:6 (slave owner?)

Husbands:

Amos 4:1 (*ba'al* is normally used for when a woman refers to her husband as 'lord')

The king as a superior:

To officials:

Gen 40:1; Judg 3:25; 1 Sam 26:15-16 (3<sup>rd</sup> person ref); 29:4 (in ref to David); 2 Sam 10:3; 12:8; 1 Kgs 11:23; 2 Kgs 5:1, 4, 18; 6:22-23, 32; 8:14; 9:7, 11, 31; 10:2-9; 18:23-24, 27; 19:4, 6; 1 Chr 12:19 (in ref to David); 2 Chr 13:6; Isa 22:18; 36:8-9, 12; 37:4, 6; Jer 27:4



To the people:

1 Sam 29:10; 11:9, 13; 1 Kgs 12:27; 22:17 // 2 Chr 18:16; Ps 45:12[11] (bride to the king; in a song)

King as suzerain:

Isa 19:4 (cruel 'lord'); 26:13 (overlords in contrast to God; see also 2 Chr 12:8)

Person other than a king in the role of ruling or other leadership function:

Gen 42:30, 33; (Joseph as executive ruler of Egypt); 45:8-9 (Joseph's speech – he is master/manager of Pharaoh's house, executive ruler of Egypt); Ps 105:21; Neh 3:5 (to Nehemiah as governor? Or to God?); Ps 12:5[4] (rhetorical question)

Deference:

Expected politeness:

Officials to their king:

אֲדֹנִי-עֲבָדְךָ deference:

1 Sam 16:16 (giving advice); 2 Sam 14:21 (giving thanks); 15:15 (statement of compliance), 21 (statement of loyalty); 2 Sam 24:3 // 1 Chr 21:3 (criticism);

אֲדֹנִי-אֲנִי deference:

2 Sam 3:21 (Abner defects to David)

אֲדֹנִי deference and no self-reference:

2 Sam 13:32-33; 1 Kgs 1:2 (giving advice), 24-27 (criticism) 36-37 (affirmation); 2 Kgs 6:12 (self-defence); Jer 38:9 (Ebed-Melech to Zedekiah)

Officials speaking about their king (i.e. third party referent)

1 Kgs 1:11, 43, 47; Dan 1:10

People to their king:<sup>43</sup>

אֲדֹנִי-עֲבָדְךָ deference:

1 Sam 26:17-19 (self-defence and request); 29:8 (self-defence); 2 Sam 9:11 (statement of compliance); 19:20-21[19-20] (accounts and request), 27-31[26-30] (self-defence), 36-38[35-37] (refusal of offer);

<sup>43</sup> In most of the references listed, the speaking varies. First person address is frequent, as is direct address.

24:21-22 (question and request; compare 1 Chr 21:23); 1 Kgs 2:38 (statement of compliance)

אדני-אני deference:

1 Sam 22:12; 2 Sam 11:11; 1 Chr 21:23 (compare 2 Sam 24:21-22)

In thanks: 2 Sam 16:4 (Ziba to David); 1 Kgs 1:31 (Bathsheba to David)

אדני deference and no self-reference:

1 Sam 24:9[8]; 2 Sam 4:8; 18:18; 18:31-32

Legal petitions:

2 Sam 14:9-21 (אדני-שפחתך\אמתך and אדני-אני deference; criticism also); 1 Kgs 3:17, 26 (אדני-אני deference); 2 Kgs 6:26 (אדני-אני deference); 8:5 (אדני deference and no self-reference)

People speaking about their king (i.e. third party referent)

1 Sam 24:7[6]; 2 Sam 2:5, 7; 1 Kgs 18:8-14; Jer 22:18; 34:5

People to a recognised high status person:

Gen 47:18, 25 (people of Egypt to Joseph; אדני-אני deference)

Ex 32:22; Num 12:11 (Aaron to Moses; אדני-אני deference);

Num 32:25-27 (Israelites to Moses; statement of compliance; אדני-עבדך deference); 36:2 (legal petition; אדני deference and no self-reference)

1 Sam 1:26 (Hannah to the [high] priest Eli; אדני-אני deference)

2 Sam 1:10 (messenger to David; אדני-אני deference)

People to a prophet:

1 Kgs 18:7 (אדני-עבדך deference; introduces direct address); 2 Kgs 2:19 (אדני deference and no self-reference; request); 4:16 (אדני-עבדך deference; criticism/disbelief), 28 (אדני-אני deference; emotional indirect request; same person as v.16); 6:5 (אדני deference and no self-reference; indirect request); 8:12-13 (אדני-עבדך deference; surprise/thanks)

Foreign visitors to an official/high dignitary (Joseph's brothers to Joseph):

Gen 42:10 (אדני-עבדך deference; self defence); 43:20 (אדני-אני deference to Joseph's steward; self-defence); 44:16 (אדני-אני deference and once use of עבדך; compliance)

Vassalship:

2 Chr 2:13-14[14-15] (אדני-עבדך deference; also first person references);

Offers of hospitality:

Gen 18:3 and 19:2 (אדני-עבדך deference)

Gen 24:18-19; Judg 4:18 (אדני-אני deference; women speaking)

To a superior in specific contexts:

In self-defence:

Gen 44:7-9 (אדני-עבדך deference and direct address); 1 Sam 1:15 (אדני-אני deference); Dan 10:16-17 (אדני-עבדך and אדני-אני deference)

In supplication:

אדני-עבדך deference:

Gen 44:18-33 (Judah to Joseph; deference varies); 1 Kgs 1:13-18 (Bathsheba to David; also direct address); 1 Kgs 18:8-14 (Obadiah to Elijah)

אדני-אני deference:

Jer 37:20 (Jeremiah to Zedekiah; also direct address in prior criticism); Dan 10:19 and 12:8 (Daniel to the angel)

אדני deference and no self-reference

Zech 1:9; 4:4; 6:4 (Zechariah to the angel; formulaic questions)

In thanks:

אדני-שפחתך deference: Ruth 2:13 (Ruth to Boaz)

To equals/inferiors:

אדני-עבדך (אדני-שפחתך\אמתך) deference:

1 Sam 25:24-31, 41 (Abigail to outlawed David; direct address included);

אדני-אני deference:

Gen 23: 6, 11, 15 (Shechemites to Abraham); Gen 32:5-6[4-5] and 33:8, 13-15 (Jacob to Esau; deference varies, including אדני-עבדך deference); 20:4, 9 (Ahab to the king of Aram; deference varies, including אדני-עבדך deference; compare the king of Aram's use of עבדך to Ahab in v.32)

A king's third person reference to himself in giving instructions:

2 Sam 20:6 and 1 Kgs 1:33

For husband:

Gen 18:12 (third party reference)

To father:

Gen 31:35 (אֲדֹנִי-אֲנִי deference; woman speaks)

Servant to master:

Num 11:28; 2 Kgs 6:15 (both use אֲדֹנִי deference and no self-reference)

Slave to master:

2 Kgs 5:3 (third party reference)

God as אֲדֹנָי (usually in conjunction with other titles/designations/YHWH):

Ex 23:17; 34:23; Dt 10:17; Josh 3:11; Neh 8:10 (NRSV seems to indicate YHWH); 10:30[29] (in apposition to YHWH); Ps 97:5; 110:1 (but differentiated from YHWH); 114:7 (RSV seems to indicate YHWH); 135:5; 136:3; 147:5; Isa 1:24; 3:1; 10:16, 33; 19:4; 51:22 (NRSV: *Sovereign* for all Isa references); Hos 12:15[14]; Mic 4:13; Zech 4:14; 6:5; Mal 3:1 (first-person self-reference).

Deference to God:

To God directly:

Judg 6:13 (אֲדֹנִי-אֲנִי deference; criticism; vv.21-23 indicates God is the hearer)

Ps 8:2[1] (NRSV: *Sovereign*; praise)

To messengers:

Gen 19:18-19 (אֲדֹנִי-עֲבָדְךָ deference; introduces direct address; request)

Josh 5:14 (אֲדֹנִי-עֲבָדְךָ deference; the hearer may be God; readiness to obey)

Zech 4:5, 13 (אֲדֹנִי deference and no self-reference; formulaic reply)

#### 4.2.2. The use of the Piel stem of שָׁרַת

The synonym שָׁרַת only appears as a verb in the Piel stem in the Hebrew Bible. The participle form can be used as a noun.

Work in tabernacle (i.e. religious use):

Levites:

General reference to duties:

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Num 1:50; Dt 10:8; 18:5,7; 1 Chr 6:32 (singing; the participle is a synonym of, or refers to specific duty covered by, עֲבוּדָה); 15:2 (includes carrying the ark); 16:4 (prayer); 16:37 (music); 26:12 (gatekeeping); 2 Chr 8:14 (includes music); 23:6; 29:11; 31:2; Jer 33:22; Ezek 44:11; 45:5 (the participle could be translated as the noun, *ministers*); 46:24 (cooking [boiling] the meat from sacrifices; the participle could be translated as the noun, *ministers*)

Work for the priests:

Num 3:6; 8:26 (different from the priests' duties); Num 18:2

'Serving' the congregation:

Ezek 44:12 (context: involved in the cultus of idolatry)

Priests' duties:

General reference to duties:

Num 3:31; 1 Chr 23:13; 2 Chr 13:10; 29:11; 31:2; Neh 10:37[36], 40[39];  
Ezek 42:14; 44:17

Interpretation of law:

Dt 17:12; 21:5

In the holy place:

Ex 28:35,43; 30:20; 35:19; 39:1,26 (implied),41; 1 Kgs 8:11 (see also v.10)  
// 2 Chr 5:14; Ezek 44:16,19,27; 45:4 (implied)

At the altar:

Ex 28:43; 29:30; 30:20; Ezek 40:46; 43:19; 44:15

'Serving' the congregation:

Ex 16:9 (in a speech of accusation to Moses and Aaron)

Samuel as 'serving' in the tabernacle:

1 Sam 2:11, 18; 3:1

Utensils and materials used in the tabernacle:

Num 4:9,12,14; 2 Kgs 25:14 // Jer 52:18.

Worshipping:

God: Isa 56:6 (foreigners; שֶׁרֵת is used as the verb equivalent to עָבַד)

Idols: Ezek 20:32.

Service to a person:

Personal service:

Personal service proper:

Gen 40:4 (Joseph *waiting upon* prisoners); 2 Sam 13:17 (שרת is used as the verb equivalent to נער); 1 Kgs 1:4,15 (Abishag to the aged King David); 19:21 (Elisha; שרת is used as the verb equivalent to נער – see v.3); Esth 1:10 (eunuchs to King Ahasuerus; this effectively makes שרת equivalent to עֲבָד); 2:2 and 6:3 (שרת is used as the verb equivalent to נער).

Status implied:

Gen 39:4 (Joseph as slave-manager); 2 Chr 22:8 (King Ahaziah's nephews); Prov 29:12 (שרת seems to be equivalent to עֲבָד).

Corvée military service for the king:

1 Chr 27:1; 28:1 (includes the leaders; שרת is a verb equivalent for עֲבָד/נער); 2 Chr 17:19 (corvée is not specified, but the numbers involved are too big to represent a permanent standing army).

This use of שרת suggests military duty may be on the level of the work of personal servants.

Subjects to the king:

Ps 101:6 (this effectively = עֲבָד)

There is a sense that the king in this psalm (the voice of the psalm is a king) will reward loyal subjects with a position in the court.

Participle used as a noun:

Personal servant/assistant:

Joshua: Ex 23:13; 33:11; Num 11:28; Josh 1:1.

Others: 2 Sam 13:18 (= synonym for נער); 1 Kgs 10:5 // 2 Chr 9:4 (courtiers differentiated from עֲבָדִים); 2 Kgs 4:43 and 6:15 (= synonym for נער; see 6:15).

Levites: Ezra 8:17.

Heavenly forces to God: Ps 103:21.

Aspects of creation (wind, fire and flame) to God: Ps 104:4.

Israel (the people of) in relation to God: Isa 61:6 (parallels 'priests')

Levites: Jer 33:21; Ezek 44:11.

Priests: Joel 1:9, 13; 2:17.

Service to Israel:

Animals, by being sacrifice to God: Isa 60:7

Foreign rulers: Isa 60:10 (parallels עֲבָד in v.12)





## CHAPTER 5

### TESTING THE METHODOLOGY

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the text of two articles accepted for publication at the time of submission. The first, Edward J. Bridge, ‘Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel’s Request to Travel through Edom in Num. 20.14-21’, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (2010), deals with an initial application of politeness theory to Num 20:14-21, to test the suitability of politeness theory as a tool for the analysis of biblical texts. The text was chosen for its brevity and its ostensible context of international diplomacy (the nation Israel communicating with the nation of Edom), a suitable setting for the use of polite language. The two rounds of communication narrated in the text also show an increase in politeness on Israel’s part as they repeat their request after Edom’s refusal. The paper concludes that politeness theory can be used for the interpretation of biblical texts.

The second article, Edward J. Bridge, ‘Politeness in the Lachish Letters’ *Vetus Testamentum*, 61 (2011), tests the use of politeness theory to the Lachish letters, a corpus of Hebrew language letters that date to the last few years of the kingdom of Judah. This corpus was chosen because it is non-literary in nature (i.e. language reflects actual use), is well-defined (e.g. they come from the one place and were written over a short period of time), represents a single social context (a formal subordinate-superior relationship: junior military officers writing to a superior officer), and especially because there is a high use of master-slave deference. That is, a number of social variables that could affect language production and use do not have to be considered, such as changes over time, regional variations, and adjustment for different recipients. The findings of this paper provide a ‘control’ for my analysis of deference in biblical texts: discussion can be made as to how the literary biblical texts both reflect the culture of deferential language presented in the Lachish letters as well as differ from it. These letters, along with Arad 40, the *Mešad Ḥashavyahu* plea, and some reference to other ancient Near Eastern letters, show that master-slave deferential language used in biblical narrative by subordinates to superiors and by speakers to hearers of higher social standing than themselves is true to the society of the time.

Since these articles are research articles in journals, a certain amount of repetition with Chapters 2 and 4 is unavoidable. Both articles give a review of politeness theory, with the latter drawing on the former. However, both articles were submitted before I had finalised Chapter 2, and so omit reference to the works of Thomas, Estelle, Johnston and Coetzee. ‘Polite Israel’, being the earlier of the two submissions, also omits reference to the published articles by Wilt, Shulman, and Christiansen, since I had not yet found these articles. ‘Politeness in the Lachish Letters’ also refers to self-abasement and the use of master-slave deference in the context of thanks, a topic found in Chapter 4.2.9.4. As noted there, this use of master-slave deference in biblical texts is discussed fully in an excursus, found in Appendix 1.2.

Metaphor theory is not present in these articles. Despite having early in my research dealt with metaphor theory (represented by Chapter 8.2.1), it was only after the writing of these two articles that I developed fully what aspects of metaphor theory I am using. Chapters 6-7 and 9 build on the present chapter by incorporating both politeness and metaphor theory, along with the use of narrative theory when narrative texts are discussed.

## **5.2. POLITENESS THEORY APPLIED TO NUM 20:14-21**

Section 5.2 has been accepted for publication as: Edward J. Bridge, 'Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel's Request to Travel through Edom in Num. 20.14-21', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (2010), due out in September 2010.

### **POLITE ISRAEL AND IMPOLITE EDM: ISRAEL'S REQUEST TO TRAVEL THROUGH EDM IN NUM. 20.14-21.\***

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#### **Abstract**

In Num. 20.14-21, Israel requests passage to pass through Edom but is denied. Of interest are the elements that add to Israel's request (e.g. historical preamble, and self-imposed conditions to encourage Edom to accept their request). Using politeness theory, these elements are found to be strategies of politeness, and also show that Israel has a strategy of increasing politeness during the communication with Edom. In contrast, Edom is impolite, which indicates it wishes to be superior to Israel. This is consistent with the Bible's portrayal of Edom as a 'bad brother' to Israel. The ability of politeness theory to bring out subtleties in communication in the Bible shows that it is a useful heuristic device to assist with the interpretation of biblical texts.

#### **Introduction**

Num. 20.14-21 recounts an incident in wilderness journeys where Israel requests passage through the territory of Edom, but is refused. In the flow of the wider narrative, the pericope is placed early in the journey from the Wilderness of Paran to the plains of Moab. Thematically, the pericope is placed in narrative that continues the theme of Israel's continued complaining against YHWH (20.2-13, 21.4-9) and includes Moses and Aaron's not being

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\* I wish to thank Dr Stephen Llewelyn for his reviews of previous drafts of this article.

allowed to enter Canaan (20.9-12). The pericope does not add to the theme of complaining; rather it provides relief yet prepares for the incident in 21.4-9,<sup>1</sup> and breaks up the accounts of both Miriam and Aaron's deaths (20.1, 22-29).

The passage is an exercise in diplomacy. Israel has to make the awkward request to travel through the territory of Edom. The diplomacy is achieved by the sending of messengers (20.14) to the king of Edom. The negotiations proceed in two stages: an initial request which is refused (20.14-18); and a subsequent briefer request which is also refused, but with a show of force by Edom which had been threatened in the first refusal (20.19-20). The shortening of both the second request and subsequent refusal may have the effect of increasing dramatic impact, making Edom's refusal very blunt, which is further heightened by the show of force.<sup>2</sup> The narrator concludes with a summary statement (20.21), which anticipates 21.4-9, which in turn narrates the people's frustration at the delay in the journey because they could not travel through Edom.

It is the language of the diplomacy that is the focus of my study. Israel's request shows formal characteristics that reflect diplomatic practice in the ancient Near East (ANE): annunciation formula (כה אמר); identification of the sender along with status (אחיה ישראל); preamble, which summarises the circumstances prompting the communication (20.14-16); and the request proper (20.17).<sup>3</sup> Commentators have long noted the plural 'we' in Israel's initial request, the juxtaposition of plural and singular in the subsequent request (hidden by the NRSV), and Edom's use of the singular for both themselves and Israel in the refusals (also hidden by the NRSV).<sup>4</sup> Overall, the language used for Israel can be regarded as 'polite, friendly, yet deferential'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The focus of P.J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1984), p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Noth (M. Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* [OTL; trans. G.D. Martin; London: SCM, 1968], p. 149) and Snaith (N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* [CB; London: Nelson, 1967], pp. 276-277), recent commentators view Num. 20.14-21 as a unit. See, e.g. Budd, *Numbers*, p. 223; E.W. Davies, *Numbers* (NCB; London, Grand Rapids: Marshall Pickering, Eerdmans, 1995), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> G.J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester, Downers Grove: IVP, 1981), p. 152; R.K. Harrison, *Numbers* (WEC; Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), p. 270 (reprinted as R.K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992]), using letters from Mari, Babylon, Alalakh and Amarna as models. The introductory formula כה אמר commonly introduces direct discourse in the Hebrew Bible, but Davies, *Numbers*, 209, thinks this is a coincidence in this text.

<sup>4</sup> Noted, for example, by G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903), pp. 265-266, who argues that whole peoples and large groups can be referred to in the singular. Other examples of the phenomenon occur in Num. 14.25, 21.1-3, 22, Josh. 9.7, 17.14, Judg. 1.2-3, 19.44; and Lam. 1.15-22, noted by B.A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB

But there is more to politeness and deference than just the use of formal elements in a communication. Politeness can be expressed in how language is used in relation to the topic at hand. This can be shown by the application of politeness theory to the communication, in our case the text of Num. 20.14-21. Such an application will give a theoretical basis for the observation that Israel's request is politely given. As a corollary, Edom will be shown to be unreasonably rude, which matches the usual portrayal of Edom in the Hebrew Bible. The study will also affirm the usefulness of politeness theory as a tool to assist biblical interpretation.

### Politeness Theory

The study of politeness received a major impetus with the publication in 1987 of Brown and Levinson's *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*.<sup>6</sup> The theory developed in this work, which combines theories on ritual, human interaction and communication,<sup>7</sup> attempts to explain why social harmony occurs in the context of actions that may disrupt relations, and then how this is achieved. Brown and Levinson's argument is that all people have 'face', which can be defined as a public perception of oneself,<sup>8</sup> and all people, except on occasions, desire to honour face when they interact with others, both their own and that of the other. There is a positive and negative aspect to face (following previous scholarship): 'positive face' represents a desire for approval, and 'negative face' represents the desire to be autonomous and/or not be impinged upon. Furthermore, all human interaction presents a threat to face, either the speaker's or the addressee/hearer's, and therefore spoken

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4a; New York: Doubleday, 1993) 491. The few commentators that comment on the phenomenon do not treat it as significant, except Noth *Numbers*, 149, so it is best to understand the swapping of plural and singular as a stylistic device that has no import to the meaning of the text, accepted even by Noth.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison, *Numbers*, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> P. Brown, S.C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (SIS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). This is an expansion on a chapter Brown and Levinson contributed in an earlier work: P. Brown, S.C. Levinson, 'Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena', in *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (ed., E. Goody; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 56-289.

<sup>7</sup> Brown and Levinson build upon the theories presented in E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1915); E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967); and H.P. Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts* (eds, P. Cole, J. Morgan; New York, 1975), pp. 41-58.

<sup>8</sup> Derived from Goffman, *Interaction*, p. 5, cited in D.J. Goldsmith, 'Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory', in *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; eds, B.B. Whaley, W. Samter; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), p. 220. Brown and Levinson unfortunately do not give a succinct definition of 'face'.

communication is done in such a way to lessen the threat. An important part of the argument is the claim that threats to face vary in degree, which can be measured using a combination of the social distance between interactants, the relative power difference between interactants, and the cultural weighting of the face-threatening action in question. Consequently, face-redress strategies can be graded as to the amount of redress given. The higher the face-redress, the more ‘polite’ the strategy is. But there is a risk: increasing politeness gives the increased chance that the hearer will misinterpret the speaker’s intention. The most polite strategies are when the speaker is ambiguous in intention and the hearer has to work it out (called *off-record*). An example is when someone comments, ‘the window is open’, but intends the hearer to shut it. The least polite strategies are various direct, unambiguous communications that permit no chance of miscommunication (called *bald on-record*) and therefore attempt no face-redress; for example, ‘Shut the window!’ In between are strategies that redress positive face (*positive politeness*; e.g. ‘People will think you are thoughtful if you shut the window’) and strategies that redress negative face (*negative politeness*; e.g. ‘Sorry to bother you, please can you shut the window’), of which Brown and Levinson consider the latter to give more face-redress than the former and so therefore to be more polite. Brown and Levinson focus on verbal communication, though they are aware that politeness can be expressed non-verbally, to say that the addressing of face concerns results in specific spoken (linguistic) strategies, which they claim are universal across cultures.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, politeness theory is concerned mostly with language production and patterns of language use.<sup>10</sup>

This focus on linguistic strategies is a major point of criticism by some scholars. They wish that Brown and Levinson had also covered non-verbal communication such as body language and non-verbal communication,<sup>11</sup> and that they had dealt with the use of communication to

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<sup>9</sup> The theory is described in Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, pp.59-91, with the rest of the work giving detail and proofs. Brown and Levinson make their claim for universality by giving examples from English, Tamil and a tribal language from Mexico. For convenient summaries, see T. Holtgraves, ‘The Linguistic Realization of Face Management: Implications for Language Production and Comprehension, Person Perception, and Cross-Cultural Communication’, *Social Psychology Quarterly* 55 (1992), pp. 141-144; and the recent summary in Goldsmith, ‘Politeness Theory’, pp. 219-236.

<sup>10</sup> The study of politeness comes under the discipline of linguistics known as *pragmatics*, and in a sub-category of study called *honorifics*, noted by Brown and Levinson themselves (*Politeness*, pp. 179, 276) and affirmed in A. Agha, *Language and Social Relations* (SSCFL 24; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 301-332, esp. 301-303, 315-323; and in S. Okamoto, ‘Politeness and the Perception of Irony: Honorifics in Japanese’, *Metaphor and Symbol* 17 (2002), pp. 119-201.

<sup>11</sup> Most critics; see, e.g. Agha, *Language*, p. 316, also pp. 308, 311; and K. Tracy, ‘Discourse and Identity: Language or Talk?’ in *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LEA’s

create identity.<sup>12</sup> Brown and Levinson's focus on requests ('impositions'),<sup>13</sup> the speaker-addressee relationship,<sup>14</sup> and on a single turn of conversation between interactants<sup>15</sup> is also criticised, but it needs to be noted that some of these criticisms have in fact become an impetus for applying the theory to situations not covered by Brown and Levinson. Despite the criticisms, politeness theory has proved valuable in explaining patterns of communication in a number of cultures, and has been used to study how communication can be used to create identity.<sup>16</sup>

A text such as Num. 20.14-21 is amenable to the application of politeness theory. It is a written text, therefore non-verbal language is not an issue; it deals with a request; and the communication between Israel and Edom has only two turns in it. That politeness theory can be applied to our text is affirmed by some studies that apply the theory to other literary works from the past. Brown and Gilman apply the theory to four of Shakespeare's tragedies to indicate when the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson occur, and offer explanations when they unexpectedly do not occur (e.g. anger).<sup>17</sup> Lloyd discusses a selection of texts from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to determine the *off-record* strategies in those texts.<sup>18</sup> The importance of these two studies is not just that politeness theory is found useful to help interpret literary texts from the past, but that the theory can be applied to literary works, in which language is 'designed to serve literary purposes, not necessarily to reflect the patterns of everyday speech in any straightforward way.'<sup>19</sup>

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Communication Series; eds, B.B. Whaley, W. Samter; Mahwah, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), esp. pp. 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> J. Hendry, 'To Wrap or Not to Wrap: Politeness and Penetration in Ethnographic Inquiry', *Man* 24 (1989), pp. 629-631; Goldsmith, 'Politeness', pp. 232-233; L. Josephides, 'Disengagement and Desire: The Tactics of Everyday Life', *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999), p. 142. Politeness theory is essentially a functionalist theory; that is, it shows expected behaviour and norms in a society.

<sup>13</sup> M.J. Cody, D. Dunn, 'Accounts', in *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; eds, B.B. Whaley, W. Samter; Mahwah, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), p. 244; Holtgraves, 'Linguistic Realization', pp. 145-146.

<sup>14</sup> Agha, *Language*, p. 316.

<sup>15</sup> Holtgraves, 'Linguistic Realization', p. 151; Tracy, 'Discourse', p. 23-24.

<sup>16</sup> See esp. Hendry, 'To Wrap'; and Josephides, 'Disengagement'.

<sup>17</sup> R. Brown, A. Gilman, 'Politeness Theory and Shakespeare's Four Major Tragedies', *Language in Society* 18 (1989), pp. 159-212. They critique the theory on the matter of Brown and Levinson's grading of the strategies.

<sup>18</sup> M. Lloyd, 'The Politeness of Achilles: Off-Record Conversation Strategies in Homer and the Meaning of "Kertomia"', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 124 (2004), pp. 75-89. The article highlights some of the subtleties of language in the two texts.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd, 'Achilles', p. 75. Lloyd is enthusiastic about this, but Brown and Gilman, p. 208, are more cautious. See also A. Paternoster, 'Decorum and Indecorum in the Seconda Redazione of Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro Del Cortegiano*', *The Modern Language Review* 99 (2004), p. 626, who does not use an explicit theory to discuss politeness in a sixteenth century Italian literary work, but recognises the concepts with which Brown and

Politeness theory has yet to become familiar to both historians of antiquity and biblical scholars. I have so far found only one study that applies politeness theory to biblical texts. This is Revell's application of the theory in his discussion of deferential speech by the characters in the Books of Judges – 2 Kings.<sup>20</sup> The theory assists him to determine two situations when characters do not use deferential language where it is normally expected: when characters express strong emotion; and when a character has a formal relationship with the addressee (even if the addressee is a social superior). In conjunction with other linguistic theory, Revell understands the former situation to be a 'marking' in the text: that is, the narrator creates a stress or emphasis that the reader or hearer is to note as important.<sup>21</sup>

### Politeness Strategies in Num. 20.14-20

As has already been noted, the request by Israel in Num. 20.14-21 incorporates formal conventions that indicate its inherent politeness to Edom. But some of these formal elements are also strategies of politeness in politeness theory, along with the language used in the request proper. The request is in effect a huge face-threatening action with the potential of a significant loss to Edom's face as a nation if something was to go wrong (i.e. Israel invades or raids Edom).

The formal convention, identification of the sender along with status (אֶחֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל), uses kinship terminology (20.14b). In politeness theory, this terminology indicates the *positive politeness* strategy, 'use in-group identity markers'. This reflects the speaker's claim that they and the hearer have common ground and want similar things.<sup>22</sup> In biblical texts, the key in-group identity markers are familial terms (e.g. *son*, *brother*), which reflects an ANE custom that goes back at least to the Amarna period.<sup>23</sup> In the case of Edom, other biblical texts

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Levinson deal. Paternoster focuses on the unexpected use of *bald on-record* speech in one part of the text by characters who are socially inferior to their hearers.

<sup>20</sup> E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), pp. 267-274. See also A.L. Warren-Rothlin, 'Politeness Strategies in Biblical Hebrew and West African Languages', *Journal of Translation* (2007), pp. 55-71.

<sup>21</sup> Revell, *Designation*, pp. 272-274. C.f., Tracy, 'Discourse', p. 25: 'Marking ... is a way speakers convey that the taken for granted identities expected for a specific interactional one ... do not apply.'

<sup>22</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> W.L. Moran (ed., trans.), *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992) xxiv-xxv, 1-115, 275, 298. In the Amarna letters, the use of 'brother' is normally restricted to between kings of equal status (see EA 1-42). In a similar fashion, in 1 Kgs. 20.31-34 אָח appears prominently as the term that



continue to claim the ‘common ground’,<sup>24</sup> in the form of an ethnic tie between Edom and Israel (e.g. Gen. 25-33, Deut. 2.8, 23.8, Amos 1.11; Obad. 10, 12, Mal 1.2).

The formal convention of a preamble (20.14c-16), like the identification of the sender, is also a strategy of *positive politeness*. Here, it is the strategy of ‘give (or ask for) reasons’, and works on the principle that the speaker claims reflexivity with the hearer, a form of desire to cooperate with the hearer.<sup>25</sup> In Brown and Levinson’s scheme, this strategy is more polite than the strategy of using in-group identity markers. Thus, just by the use of formal conventions alone, Israel is portrayed as polite, indeed increasingly polite, and desiring to meet Edom’s desire for approval.

Israel’s request, *now let us pass through your land* (20.17) is unambiguous, and therefore clearly *on-record*. As has already been discussed, the request is a significant face-threatening act, which accounts for the use of the two politeness strategies that form the conventional opening to the message. But Israel’s request contains yet more politeness strategies. Immediately following the request is a statement of what Israel will and will not do (stay on the *King’s Highway*, and not drink Edom’s water). In Brown and Levinson’s scheme, Israel’s statement could be a *positive politeness* strategy, ‘offer, promise’, or a negative strategy, ‘minimise the imposition’.<sup>26</sup> The former, however, implies some prior attempt by Israel to cooperate with Edom, something which is not present in the text. Therefore it is best to understand Israel’s statement as the latter strategy. According to Brown and Levinson, this strategy is more polite than the two strategies in the opening to the message. This suits: the most polite strategy used so far is reserved for the request proper. The thought behind this strategy is that Israel honours Edom’s desire to be autonomous, or not to be impinged upon, by restricting the effects of the request.

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indicates to Ben-hadad that his enemy, the king of Israel, who has defeated him, will spare his life. Here, the use of a ‘common ground/in-group’ term results in just that: an ‘in-group’ relationship has been established. אֶחָד appears prominently in David’s request to Nabal in 1 Sam. 25.8 for supplies.

<sup>24</sup> Noted by most commentators; e.g. J. Sturdy, *Numbers* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 142; Davies, *Numbers*, p. 209; Gray, *Numbers*, p. 265. Recent commentators refer to J.R. Bartlett, ‘The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969), pp. 1-20; and ‘The Brotherhood of Edom’, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 4 (1977), pp. 2-27.

<sup>25</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, pp. 102, 131.

After the refusal by Edom, Israel repeats the request (20.19) with increased politeness. A repeated use of the strategy ‘minimise the imposition’ heads the message (*we will stay on the highway*), designed to defuse the impact of the request itself, which is left to last. But before Israel restates the request, there is a promise to pay for any water used (*if we drink of your water, I and my cattle, I will then pay for it*<sup>27</sup>). This is a *negative politeness* strategy, ‘go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer’.<sup>28</sup> According to Brown and Levinson this is the most polite strategy possible without going *off-record* (using ambiguous language). This promise to pay for water, like the insistence that Israel will stay on the *King’s Highway*, could also be considered as an example of the *positive politeness* strategy ‘offer, promise’, but the mention of paying a price shows that the comment is actually an ‘incur a debt’ strategy. The aim of the ‘incur a debt’ strategy is to redress any concerns by Edom that will arise from Israel’s passage through their territory. The text portrays Israel as interpreting Edom’s refusal as a concern they will use up precious water resources as they travel through Edom’s territory.<sup>29</sup>

The effect of the ‘incur a debt’ strategy is heightened by Israel making yet another statement that minimises the request: the matter of paying for water *is only a small matter* (רק אינדיבר). The problem of using water in an environment such as Edom’s is understandably a major concern, and Israel’s statement may seem like a downgrading of the situation. Despite this apparent downgrading, the comment is designed to put Edom at ease: Israel implies they can pay for any water used; and so therefore should be a small matter to Edom. It is an attempt to soothe Edom that they will not lose out if water is consumed.

In contrast to Israel, Edom is blunt in both refusals (20.18, 20).<sup>30</sup> The language is clear on both occasions: *you (sing) shall not pass through*, which is a *bald on-record* statement. There is no chance Israel will miss the meaning. Politeness theory indicates that *bald on-record* language is mostly used in three situations: when the speaker is socially superior to (has power over) the hearer, when the danger to the hearer’s face is very small, or the speaker

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<sup>27</sup> The NRSV translate all these clauses in the plural.

<sup>28</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> C.f. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, p. 493. Most commentators note the contrast between Num. 20.19 and Deut. 2.6 on the matter of payment for resources used. Deut. 2.6 has the offer of payment as part of the request, and includes food; whereas here in Num. 20.19, the offer of payment is stated after Edom’s initial refusal.

<sup>30</sup> C.f. Harrison, *Numbers*, p. 271.

considers the matter important enough to override the need to redress face.<sup>31</sup> Revell finds that this is the case for situations in Judg.-2 Kgs. in which the first and third scenarios appear. But Revell also finds that *bald on-record* language is used by a socially inferior person to a socially superior person when they are in a formal relationship with each other.<sup>32</sup> In Num. 20.14-20, Edom's bluntness can be explained by three of the four scenarios: Edom has power over Israel; Edom is a 'brother' to Israel; or Edom thinks the matter of Israel's request too offensive to be polite about it. Of these scenarios, the first or the third suits the portrayal of Edom, with the first being the best. Edom, in the first refusal, threatened to fight against Israel if they were to pass through their territory, and in 20.20, the narrative has Edom carry out the threat.<sup>33</sup> In effect, Edom wants to be the superior party in contrast to Israel's focus on redressing potential problems that may occur as a result of their travel through Edom's territory.

To summarise, Israel's strategy of politeness in its request for passage through Edom is to use politeness strategies before stating the request proper. Not only this, the strategies used represent increasing politeness. This happens in both turns of their communication with Edom, and across both turns. To list Israel's strategy, it is:

- Use 'in-group identity markers' (אֶחָיוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל), which introduces Israel's communication (20.14b).
- Use the more polite *positive politeness* strategy, 'give (or ask for) reasons' (preamble [20.14c-16]) to introduce the request proper.
- State the request (*let us pass through your land* [20.17a]).
- Back up the request with the yet more polite again, but now the *negative politeness* strategy, 'minimise the imposition', as an attempt to restrict the effects of the request (stay on the *King's Highway*, and not drink Edom's water [20.17b-d]).

In the second turn of the communication, the strategy is:

- Repeat the 'minimise the imposition' strategy, which, as in the first turn of the interaction, precedes the restated request (*we will stay on the highway* [20.19b]).

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<sup>31</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> See above, fn.21.

<sup>33</sup> An actual conflict is not narrated, so most commentators assume what is implied in 20.21: Edom offered a show of force to force Israel not to travel through their territory. See, e.g. Davies, *Numbers*, p. 210; Wenham *Numbers*, p. 152; Budd *Numbers*, p. 225

- Use the most polite strategy available, short of going *off-record*, which is the *negative politeness* strategy, ‘go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer’, which also precedes the restated request (*if we drink of your water, I and my cattle, I will then pay for it* [20.19c-d]). This last strategy is heightened by combining it with the strategy, ‘minimise the imposition’ (*it is only a small matter* [רק אי־דבר] [20.19e]).
- Restate the request (20.19f).

In contrast, Edom is blunt, therefore impolite, in both of their turns in the communication.

## Conclusion

Num. 20.14-21 portrays Israel as very polite to Edom, and increasing in politeness over the two turns of the communication. In contrast, Edom is portrayed as refusing to be a ‘brother’ to Israel by wanting to take the role of superior. This accords with the Hebrew Bible’s motif of Edom as a ‘bad brother’ to Israel/Judah, starting in Gen. 25 and culminating in the prophetic writings in which Edom receives the most prophecies of condemnation and judgement of any nation outside of Israel/Judah in the region.<sup>34</sup> But politeness theory also shows a further reason why Edom is such a ‘bad brother’: the nation is portrayed as only concerned with its desire to be superior to Israel, just as its ancestor is portrayed in Gen. 25.29-34 and 27.34-41,<sup>35</sup> and similarly in Obadiah 10-14. Therefore, God is right to reject Edom in favour of Israel/Judah.

Obviously, the use of politeness theory to assist interpreting biblical texts needs to be used with caution. Despite its amenability to written texts, some of the criticisms as noted above need to be kept in mind. The issue of culture is particularly important. There is insufficient data in the Bible from which to describe a ‘biblical culture’ or ‘biblical cultures’.<sup>36</sup> Despite grading the strategies of politeness in accordance with Brown and Levinson’s system, it might be that biblical authors/compliers had a different system of grading politeness. It might also

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<sup>34</sup> G. McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament Vol 4: The Prophets* (London: SPCK, 2002), p. 182; J.J. Niehaus, ‘Obadiah’, *The Minor Prophets Vol 2: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed., T.E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 495-541, 496; D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* WBC 31 (Waco: Word, 1987), p. 404. These scholars also comment that the Hebrew Bible makes Edom representative of God’s judgement of all nations. The accord of Num. 20.14-21 with prophets’ oracles against Edom permits the possibility that this narrative was written/complied during the same period these oracles were delivered. See fn.38.

<sup>35</sup> C.f. Heb. 12:16-17, which continues the same thought.

<sup>36</sup> As noted for literary texts in general by Brown and Gilman, p. 208.

be that Israel's request was not a face-threatening action,<sup>37</sup> which, if so, would indicate that Edom's refusal is unreasonable. This issue of culture is also not helped by the problem of discerning what in a biblical text reflects the period of time that the text portrays as against the time at which it was written up or compiled.<sup>38</sup> Politeness theory can only work when there is adequate data to work with, so it is important to use as much information from ANE archaeological and epigraphic studies as possible. Furthermore, since 'conversation in literary works will of course be designed to serve literary purposes, not necessarily to reflect the patterns of everyday speech in any straightforward way,'<sup>39</sup> and because in dramatic works 'the speech is not elicited from informants but was invented by authors for purposes of their own,'<sup>40</sup> it should be recognised that there will be instances where polite language will not be used when it is expected and be used when it is expected not to be used. It also means that authors could use expected politeness to bring out other themes that show up characters to be something other than what they appear. However, despite these issues, politeness theory remains a good heuristic device to explore the intentionality of literary texts. In the case of Num. 20.14-21, the portrayal of Israel as the polite social inferior to the powerful and impolite Edom serves to continue the motif in the Hebrew Bible that Edom is rejected by God for being a 'bad brother' and concerned with his own wants. Edom in Num. 20.14-21 may be portrayed correctly using *bald on-record* language, but the text adds to the Bible's portrayal of Edom as always being unreasonable to Israel.

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<sup>37</sup> Implied in Harrison *Numbers*, p. 271: 'In antiquity it was usual for some conditions to be imposed upon those who travelled through another's territory, whether it was a toll in goods or money or some other kind of stipulation.' Since Harrison does not cite any texts, it not possible to discern whether groups of travellers were treated differently from individual travellers. It is unlikely that large groups of people from one nation or ethnic group would come under the normal arrangements for travellers, thus giving rise to biblical texts such as Num. 20.14-21 and 21.21-22 (paralleled in Deut. 2.26-29 and Judg. 11.17-19), in which passage is negotiated. IN support is the Egyptian text, 'The Report of a Frontier Official' (J.B. Pritchard [ed.], *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* 3rd Ed [Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1969], p. 259). This text indicates permission was given to people from the region of Edom to come into Egypt during a time of drought, though the conditions for their entry are not stated.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, pp. 93-94, 485, 491-492, who argues Num. 20.14-21 reflects increasing Edomite power and hostility against Israel in the eighth century BCE. Budd *Numbers*, p. 225, understands Num. 20.14-21 to reflect the time of Josiah. Sturdy, *Numbers*, p. 141, argues that Num. 20.14-21 was created to fill in a gap in earlier sources, possibly at 500-400 BCE (p.2), which suits a time when it was known that Edom's hostility had resulted in the gaining of territory at Israel's expense as a result of the exile (p.142).

<sup>39</sup> Lloyd 'Achilles', p. 75.

<sup>40</sup> Brown and Gilman, p. 208.

### Further comments

As noted above, my article was submitted for publication when I was in an early stage of reviewing politeness theory and had yet to come across many of the publications reviewed in Chapter 2.3.4. As will be seen in Section 5.3, a later article, I have abandoned using Brown and Levinson's grading of politeness strategies, mostly because once communication involves more than short turns, it becomes difficult to determine whether one politeness strategy is more polite than another. As will be shown in Chapter 7.2.3.1, even all of Abraham's short turns in his dialogue with YHWH over Sodom in Gen 18:23-33 contain a number of politeness strategies.

Since submitting the paper for publication, I have also discussed narrative theory. This theory can also assist with the interpretation of Edom's response to Israel in Num 20:14-21. For example, Bar Efrat notes that a character answering a request is a mark of a social superior.<sup>41</sup> Here, the 'character' is Edom. As the social superior in the interaction with Israel, placed in that position by Israel's polite language and by accepting it with impolite language and a show of force, Edom goes against this typical characterisation by refusing Israel's request. Thus an application of both politeness theory and narrative theory together show the nation of Edom is unreasonably rude and in keeping with biblical portrayal.

There is a translation issue with רק אין־דבר in 20:19e. I have used the NRSV translation, *it is only a small matter*. A literal translation is: *only there is not [a] matter/issue*. In effect, Israel claims that their offer of paying for water covers all matters for negotiation; there is nothing else<sup>42</sup> to negotiate. Translating רק אין־דבר in this way still affirms the politeness strategy, 'minimise the imposition'. Israel argues their travel through Edom's territory will result in the smallest inconvenience possible: simply their presence on a recognised travelling route; and their use of water, which they will pay for. They will do 'nothing else'.

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<sup>41</sup> Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSS 70; BLS 17; trans. D. Shefer-Vanson; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989) 74. See Chapter 6 for how Nabal and David fit into this observation.

<sup>42</sup> C.f. NASB and NIV. The AV translates as *there shall be no hurt*, assumedly referring to economic loss to Edom, or maybe a threat of attack.

### **5.3. POLITENESS THEORY APPLIED TO THE OBSEQUIOUS LANGUAGE IN THE LACHISH LETTERS**

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#### **POLITE LANGUAGE IN THE LACHISH LETTERS\***

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#### **Abstract**

A study of the Lachish letters (ostraca) that goes beyond treating conventional formulae as simply epistolary phenomena or scribal preference shows that such language, along with other forms of language expressed in the letters, reflects a culture of high politeness. However, this culture is not restrictive. The senders also feel free to express their opinion and even criticise the recipient at times, with a corresponding reduction in respectful language. Such adjustment of language use to topic and/or emotion explains the variation in both conventional and other forms of polite language. When compared to biblical narrative and prayer, the letters affirm the biblical portrayal of social relationships. That is, the biblical portrayal of generally high politeness to a social superior or deity yet freedom to express opinion and criticism, along with the reduction in politeness that naturally occurs with it reflects social reality of the time.

#### **Keywords**

Politeness, Lachish, deference, lord, servant, self-abasement

#### **Introduction**

This article addresses a matter that has featured little in studies of speech in Hebrew Bible narrative and in studies of letters from the ancient Near East: the relationship between conventional, and especially polite, language to the subject matter/s of the speech or letter.

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Generally, for ancient letters, variations in conventional language are attributed to scribal differences (e.g. an individual scribe's preference and/or training),<sup>1</sup> or reflect the social distance between sender and recipient.<sup>2</sup> Only rarely is a comment made that the subject matter of a given letter might account for a change in language.<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew Bible has fared a little better. For example, studies show that the deferential use of slave terms (עבד, אמה, שפחה) in narrative is primarily related to requests; and in Psalms, its use is only found in supplication and carries the connotations of dependency and loyalty to God.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the variation in the deferential use of slave terms in narrative has also been found to be connected with the context in which a dialogue or conversation takes place, as well as the relative social status between interactants.<sup>5</sup>

I propose that the content or subject matter of a speech or letter should be factored into analyses of variation in conventional language. This is done by an analysis of the Lachish letters to ascertain first the role of respectful language in these letters and then how such language varies in connection with the letters' contents. The findings are then related to the Hebrew Bible to suggest that the Lachish letters affirm the biblical portrayal of a culture of high politeness toward social superiors, yet with freedom to use direct address when expressing one's opinion.

<sup>1</sup> E.g. F. B. Knutson, "Cuneiform Letters and Social Conventions", *Semeia* 22 (1982), pp. 20-22 (for Ugaritic, Amarna, and Neo-Babylonian letters); D. Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* (SBLSPS 15; Chico, 1982), pp. 55-56, 81, 94 (differing scribal traditions between the Arad and Lachish [Hebrew] letters); W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, 1992), pp. 24, 204, 258, 284 (n. 1), 320 (n. 1) (Amarna letters); R. Hawley, *Studies in Ugaritic Epistolography* (Dissertation, University of Chicago; Ann Arbor, 2003), pp. 214-218 (Ugaritic language address formulae).

<sup>2</sup> Hawley, *Ugaritic Epistolography*, pp. 267-667. Social distance can also be a perceived affair. Both Knutson, "Cuneiform Letters", p. 20, and E. F. Morris, "Bowling and Scraping in the Ancient Near East: An Investigation into Obsequiousness in the Amarna Letters", *JNES* 65 (2006), pp. 179-195, note that the amount of servile language in the Amarna letters reflects the relationship between vassal and Egyptian overlord: the more tenuous the relationship, the more servile the language.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. Pardee, *Handbook*, p.102, for the different greeting wish of *Lachish* 6; Hawley, *Ugaritic Epistolography*, p. 235, n. 52, for the absence of the prostration formula in RS 19.011; and Knutson, "Cuneiform Letters", 20, for Ugaritic and Amarna letters. Apart from RS 19.011, Hawley, *Ugaritic Epistolography*, p. 232-235, explains variation in prostration formulae as related only to social distance.

<sup>4</sup> H. Ringgren, H. Simian-Yofre, U. Rüterwörden, "עבד 'abad; עֶבֶד 'ebed; אֲבֹדָה 'abōdā", in G. J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry (eds), *TDOT, Vol. 10* (trans. D. W. Stott; Grand Rapids, 1992), pp. 392-393, and E. J. Bridge, "Loyalty, Dependency and Status with YHWH: the use of 'bd in the Psalms", *VT* 59 (2009), pp. 372-374.

<sup>5</sup> E. J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen, 1996), pp. 267-274, 295-298, 312, 317-320.



## The Lachish letters

The Lachish letters are inscribed ostraca excavated Tell ed-Duweir (usually, but not universally, identified with biblical Lachish), of which Lachish 2-6, 8-9, 12-13, and 16-18 can be classified as letters.<sup>6</sup> They have been chosen because of their small number, their dating to the late monarchic period (589-586 BC),<sup>7</sup> the importance they have for biblical Hebrew,<sup>8</sup> and their frequent use of conventional language (master-slave deference, greeting wishes, and the self-abasement formula *מי עבדך כלב כי*). Three letters are addressed to a certain Ya'osh (Lachish 2, 3, 6), but only one (Lachish 3) records the name of a sender, a certain Hosha'yahu. Variation in the style of script between the letters suggests they are the work of different authors or maybe scribes.<sup>9</sup> The contents of the extant letters suggest each is the occasional missive of a subordinate to a superior in a military context. The senders give reports, comment on the situation of the time,<sup>10</sup> and express thanks and criticism.

Beyond philological and interpretative concerns (the major area of study of the letters), focus has been mostly on the prescripts and how they might reveal authorship and possible scribal traditions.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, conventional language has been usually treated as epistolary convention only, which is in keeping with discussion on ancient epistolography in general.<sup>12</sup> However, Emerton has recently argued that language may vary on the basis of a letter's

<sup>6</sup> Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 12, based on the criterion on p. 2: a letter is 'a written document effecting communication between two or more persons who cannot communicate orally'. C.f. P. Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia* (SBLWAW 3; Atlanta, 1993), p. 2: one purpose of writing is 'to bridge communicative distance.'

<sup>7</sup> For a contrary opinion, see N. R. Ganor, "The Lachish Letters", *PEQ* 99 (1967), pp. 74-77 (tenth century BCE), and J. W. Jack, "The Lachish Letters: Date, Import, vs. Torczyner", *PEQ* 70 (1938), p. 167 (eighth century BCE). They include as an argument that the scripts of the ostraca resemble scripts on ostraca dated to earlier periods.

<sup>8</sup> See the literature in Pardee, *Handbook*, pp. 67-77, and F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow, R. E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, 2005), pp. 300-303.

<sup>9</sup> S. Birnbaum, "The Lachish Ostraca", *PEQ* 71 (1939), pp. 20-28, 91-110. See also H. Torczyner, *Lachish I (Tell ed Duweir): The Lachish Letters* (London, 1938), p. 15; and R. S. Haupt, "The Lachish Letters," *BA* 1:4 (1938), pp. 30-32.

<sup>10</sup> This is a matter still discussed. See Z. B. Begin, "Does Lachish Letter 4 Contradict Jeremiah XXXIV 7?" *VT* 52 (2002), pp. 166-174; and N. Na'aman, "The Distribution of Messages in the Kingdom of Judah in Light of the Lachish Ostraca", *VT* 53 (2003), pp. 169-180.

<sup>11</sup> Birnbaum, "Lachish Ostraca," pp. 24-27; Pardee, *Handbook*, pp. 55-56, 81. Pardee's view is more evident on p. 29, in his discussion of letter types found in the Arad ostraca.

<sup>12</sup> See the articles by members of the SBL Ancient Epistolography Group in *Semeia* 22.

content.<sup>13</sup> That is, variations in epistolary and other conventional language may not just be due to scribal preferences.

Because of the reasons listed above, the letters lend themselves well to analyses of language use. A single recipient, Ya'osh, for all the letters can be assumed, helped by the fact that Lachish 1-15 and 18 were found in the one location. Lachish 16 and 17, though found in a different location, are too fragmentary to use in discussions about their recipients.<sup>14</sup> These factors together diminish the risk of regional and temporal variation in language, along with the risk of variation in language to suit multiple recipients. That ostraca were used suggests letters would be brief, helped by a comment in Lachish 4:3 that a report accompanies the sender's ostrakon. This permits recognition that the use of polite conventional language such as prayer wishes and deference was important to the senders, since it takes up space. However, the presence of unused space on the ostraca (Lachish 2 and 5 have wide top and bottom margins and do not use the reverse side, and Lachish 3, 4 and 9 do not use all the space on the reverse) suggests the senders had room for freedom in expression, despite being constrained by the necessity of brevity. This freedom includes the use of standardised conventions of the time and region, adjusted to suit communication to Ya'osh.

One variable that cannot be removed in the analysis is language usage by individual senders. Despite adherence to common conventions and adjustments to suit a hearer or recipient, as Birnbaum argues, individuals also use language in unique ways, and can vary in their use of language based on their mood at the time of communication.<sup>15</sup> This also includes scribes, if they were used. The possible influence of scribes on a sender's letter is a notorious issue in ancient epistolography study,<sup>16</sup> but the *Mešad Hashavyahu* plea shows that in late monarchic period Judah, scribes could at times simply write what was dictated to them.<sup>17</sup> My point is that

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<sup>13</sup> J. C. Emerton, "Were the Lachish Letters sent to or from Lachish?" *PEQ* 133 (2001), p. 6. Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 102, also considers the possibility that the unique greeting wish in *Lachish* 6 (see Table 1 below) may also be related to topic, as well as it might be idiosyncratic to the sender.

<sup>14</sup> Lachish 16 mentions a prophet; Lachish 17 preserves deferential language, but not the subject matter.

<sup>15</sup> C.f. D. J. Goldsmith, "Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory", in B.B. Whaley, W. Samter (eds), *Explaining Communication: Contemporary Theories and Exemplars* (LCS; Mahwah, 2007), p. 232, citing studies on how mood affects politeness in communication.

<sup>16</sup> See Knutson, "Cuneiform Conventions," p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> The *Mešad Hashavyahu* text shows good writing skills (indicative of a scribe), but poor grammar (indicative of dictation by a non-educated person). For discussion, see Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 55; J. Naveh, "A Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C.", *IEJ* 10 (1960), p. 136; and S. Talmon, "The New Hebrew Letter from the Seventh Century B.C. in Historical Perspective", *BASOR* 176 (1964), p. 29.

variation in epistolary formulae and other conventional language could be due to more factors than scribal tradition or scribes' abilities. This study assumes multiple senders,<sup>18</sup> and assumes that the wording of the letters is what the senders wanted penned.

## Methodology

To analyse the role of conventional and deferential language in the Lachish letters, politeness theory is used. Developed by Brown and Levinson,<sup>19</sup> politeness theory has become influential in linguistic and cross-cultural studies. It has been outlined elsewhere (including critique) along with its relevance to biblical and other ancient texts, so only a brief summary is needed here.<sup>20</sup> Politeness theory argues that people desire to honour 'face', which affects how they speak to others. 'Face' can be described as the 'public self-image that every [person] wants to claim for himself'.<sup>21</sup> In interactions, people not only to maintain their own 'face', but also normally desire to maintain the 'face' of those with whom they interact. 'Politeness' is the term that covers the strategies used to address threats to the other's 'face'.

Two key arguments of politeness theory are relevant for this study. One is that 'face' is divided into two aspects: positive face, which represents the desire for approval; and negative face, which represents the desire to be autonomous. Consequently, politeness strategies are also divided into 'positive politeness' and 'negative politeness', depending on which aspect of 'face' the strategies deal with. Positive politeness covers communication that, for example, affirm the hearer in some way (including flattery), use in-group language, give reasons for a request, make promises, include the hearer, and claim to take the hearer's interests into account. Negative politeness covers, for example, indirectness, hedging, minimising the implication of requests, the use of deference and third-person reference, and accepting a debt because of the communication.<sup>22</sup> A second key argument is that face-threat can be measured

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<sup>18</sup> In line with Birnbaum, "Lachish Ostraca," pp. 23, 25; Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 77; Na'aman, "Distribution," p. 175; and Emerton, "Were," pp. 6-7. This does not deny a sender may have sent more than one letter. See Pardee for speculation (*Handbook*, pp. 108, 80). *Lachish 2, 6-8 and 18*, being sherds from the same vessel, can imply a single sender for these letters. In contrast, single authorship is assumed by J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions: Volume 1: Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1971), p. 32, and Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 322.

<sup>19</sup> P. Brown, S. C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (SIS 4; Cambridge, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> E. J. Bridge, "Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel's Request to Travel through Edom in Num 20.14-21", *JSOT* 35 (2010) [forthcoming]. For a recent general summary, see Goldsmith, "Politeness Theory," pp. 219-236.

<sup>21</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 61, n. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, pp. 102, 131.

on the basis of the social distance and the power difference between interactants, and the 'size' of any imposition (request) or implied requirement of the hearer to respond to the speaker.<sup>23</sup>

Politeness theory has been applied to the Hebrew Bible to discuss deference in speech in Judges-2 Kings, to debate the use of נָ in biblical narrative, and to analyse Num 20:14-21.<sup>24</sup> However, it needs to be noted that not enough information can be obtained from a literary text such as the Hebrew Bible to do more than speculate about conventions of politeness in biblical Israel.<sup>25</sup> For example, the use of imperatives by social inferiors in biblical narrative and by supplicants to God (in Psalms and prayers in narrative) is common.<sup>26</sup> The same occurs in Arad 18 and Lachish 3 and 9.<sup>27</sup> Politeness theory argues that imperatives would be used only by the superior. But the combined witness of the biblical, Arad and Lachish texts suggest that ancient Israelites did not automatically consider imperatives to be impolite. However, the presence of נָ with many imperatives and jussives suggests that they recognised that requests often needed to be softened with a polite term.<sup>28</sup> That is, even though imperatives may not have been viewed as impolite by Israelites, the Hebrew Bible witnesses to conventions of politeness for requests and volition.

<sup>23</sup> Brown and Levinson focus on requests in conversations. A. L. Warren-Rothlin, "Politeness Strategies in Biblical Hebrew and West African Languages", *JT* 3:1 (2007), p. 56, draws attention to the fact that nearly every conversation has an 'implied requirement of the hearer to respond to the speaker' (.

<sup>24</sup> Revell, *Designation*, pp. 267-273; A. Shulman, "The Particle נָ in Biblical Hebrew Prose", *HS* 40 (1990), pp. 67-74; T. Wilt, "A Sociolinguistic Analysis of *na*", *VT* 46 (1996), pp. 237-255; and B. Christiansen, "A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Particle *nā*: A Test Case", *VT* 59 (2009), p. 379-393; Bridge, "Polite Israel," (forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> This is an issue for literary texts in general. See R. Brown, A. Gilman, "Politeness Theory and Shakespeare's Four Major Tragedies", *Language in Society* 18 (1989), p. 208.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. B.K. Waltke, M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, 1990) §34.4b; J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Syntax* (Edinburgh, 1994) §66.

<sup>27</sup> D. Pardee, J. D. Whitehead, P. E. Dion, "An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography", *JBL* 97 (1978), p. 340, contrast the Lachish and Arad letters. See *Arad 18*, 1.4: ... תן לשמריהו ('give Shemeriah ...'); Lachish 3:4-5: ... עבדך [open [Hiphil] the ear of your servant ...]; Lachish 9:3: תן ('give ...'). The jussive coupled with לֹא in Lachish 6:8-9 (לֹא תכתב 'not write') functions as a negative imperative. It is likely that the sender of *Arad 18*, like those of the Lachish letters, is the recipient's immediate subordinate (e.g. Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 55, 315; Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 38).

<sup>28</sup> Wilt, "Sociolinguistic," p.248; Shulman, "Particle," p.67-74; Christiansen, "Linguistic," 392. נָ as expressing politeness is accepted in C. H. J. van der Merve, J. A. Naudé, J. H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3; Sheffield, 1999) §19.4.1. See also Warren-Rothlin, "Politeness," p. 68, who argues that the 'preceptive imperfect' and 'precativ perfect' are only used in address to social juniors and seniors (including God in Psalms) respectively.

## The politeness functions of master-slave deference and other conventional language

Not only do the Lachish letters shed light on the biblical use of the imperative, but the way conventional language is used in them can elucidate aspects of the use of respectful language in biblical narrative and prayer. I will start with the prescripts. All extant prescripts contain a greeting wish, usually of the form, ... ישמע יהוה את אדני ('May YHWH cause my lord to hear ...'; see Table 1 below). The wish takes the role of a salutation in Lachish 4, 5, 8 and 9. Lachish 2 and 6 provide the expected salutation of addressee (אל אדני יאוש; 'To my lord Ya'osh'), with Lachish 3 being the only letter to name the sender (עבדך הושעיהו שלח להגיד לאדני; 'Your servant Hosha'yahu sends to report to my lord Ya'osh').

In both the greeting wishes and the salutations, the use of the honorific אדני occurs. This shows that Ya'osh is the senders' superior. In politeness theory, the use of deference is a negative politeness strategy ('give deference') that delineates the relationship between sender and recipient.<sup>29</sup> The senders recognise Ya'osh's power over them and they maintain the social distance that goes with it. In effect, they recognise Ya'osh's freedom (i.e. autonomy) to be their superior. The extended salutation in Lachish 3 with its inclusion of עבדך for Hosha'yahu adds emphasis to the formality of the relationship.

The deferential use of אדני in all the extant prescripts continues with master-slave deference in the bodies: אדני used for Ya'osh instead of 'you' and עבדך for the senders instead of 'I'. Such deference is in keeping with ancient Near Eastern practice, found in other letter corpora, prayers and inscriptions. Despite its conventionality, its use represents continuing awareness by all senders of their junior status to Ya'osh, and his freedom as their superior to direct them. The use of עבדך and אדני can also be considered another negative politeness strategy, 'impersonalise the speaker and hearer.' This strategy, by avoiding direct address, dissociates both sender and recipient from any potential threat to face that might occur in the communication, so as to claim that the recipient is not impinged upon.<sup>30</sup> It might be that אדני-עבדך deference covers both strategies. No matter which interpretation best fits, the effect of the deference is to show that the senders are very polite to their superior.

<sup>29</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 131.

The greeting wishes can also be understood to be a strategy of politeness. They represent positive politeness ('notice, attend to the hearer') by claiming common ground with the recipient by focusing on his interests.<sup>31</sup> The specific interest that the senders use is Ya'osh's desire for *שלום*.<sup>32</sup> Most of the wishes include redundancies (*עת כים, שמעת*) and repetitions (*עת כים, שמעת, and/or טב*) (see Table 1 below). These serve to emphasise the senders' claim to take interest in Ya'osh. The role of the greeting wishes, therefore, even though conventional, is to open the channel of communication by showing interest in Ya'osh.

Three letters also include the self-abasement formula, *מי עבדך כלב כי* ('What is your servant, [but] a dog, that ...?' [2:3-4; 5:3-4; 6:2-3]). In these letters, it replaces the conventional *ועת* (in *Lachish* 3, 4 and 9) as the transition to the body of the letter.<sup>33</sup> *מי עבדך כלב כי* works similarly to deference, but in an extreme manner by exaggerating the relationship inequality between the senders and Ya'osh. That is, the formula emphasises Ya'osh's authority as the senders' superior. The reason for the use of the formula is somewhat debated. In 6:3-5, the context is Ya'osh's having sent the sender letters with a command to read them. In 5:4-7, the sender has received letters from Ya'osh and is returning them. In 2:4-5, the context is unspecified: the sender has been 'remembered' (*זכר*) by Ya'osh. The formula possibly appears in the fragmentary *Lachish* 12, also in the context of letters.<sup>34</sup> Since the sender in *Lachish* 6 has been commanded to read the forwarded letters and feels free to comment on them, it is best to interpret *מי עבדך כלב כי* in that letter as an expression of thanks. The context of *Lachish* 5 permits ambiguity (i.e., the sender could intend the formula as a criticism: 'Why did you send

<sup>31</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> The meaning behind the wish is debated. For 'peaceful period of time', see Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 323; Na'aman, "Distribution," p. 176-177; Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 100; K. A. D. Smelik, *Writings from Ancient Israel: A Handbook of Historical and Religious Documents* (trans., G.I. Davies; Louisville, 1991), p. 128. For 'good health', see D. Diringer, "Early Hebrew Inscriptions", in O. Tufnell (ed.), *Lachish III: The Iron Age* (London, 1953), p. 334; W.F. Albright, "Palestinian Inscriptions", in J. Pritchard (ed.), *ANET* (Princeton, 1969), p. 322.

<sup>33</sup> *ועת* is the regular transition from prescript to body of a letter in Hebrew and Aramaic epistolography, found also in most of the ostraca-letters from Arad, and in letters embedded in biblical Books (e.g. Ezra 4 and 7; 2 Kgs 5:6; 10:2). See D. Pardee, "Letters from Tel Arad", *UF* 10 (1978), p. 292; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography", *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 205, 216; and Pardee et al, "Overview," pp. 325 (n.16), 330, 339. In contrast, the use of *ht* in Ugaritic letters is used only for transition within the body of those letters. See Hawley, *Ugaritic Epistolography*, pp. 751-754; and Jesus-Luis Cunchillos (trans. W.G.E. Watson), "The Ugaritic Letters", in W. G. E. Watson, N. Wyatt (eds), *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (Handbook of Oriental Studies; Leiden, 1999): 366.

<sup>34</sup> Line 1 is broken, so *כלב אדני* could mean 'according to the heart of my lord' (c.f. Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 108).

me the letters?”), and Lachish 2 even more ambiguity.<sup>35</sup> However, Lachish 12, 16 and 18, despite being fragmentary, all mention letters forwarded to the senders, so it is reasonable to assume that Ya’osh was in the habit of forwarding letters to his subordinates for comment. Therefore, *מי עבדך כלב כי* should be understood as a formula of thanks by the senders. If it expressed criticism, Lachish 3 provides an amenable context for its use, but it does not appear in that letter. Politeness theory indicates that expressing thanks puts the speaker in debt to the hearer or at least humbles his/her own face.<sup>36</sup> By using self-abasement, the senders humble their own face, but avoid being indebted to Ya’osh by indirectly implying he is magnanimous; that is, he has acted on the basis of generosity.

The difficulty of interpreting the intent of *מי עבדך כלב כי* is related to the varied metaphorical meanings the Semitic term *כלב* (‘dog’) had. It is used metaphorically in Ugaritic, Amarna and neo-Assyrian letters, and in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>37</sup> For example, in the Amarna letters, *כלב* is used in formulaic statements of loyalty to the Egyptian king (e.g. EA 201, 202, 247, 314-316, EA 319, 320, 322-325, EA 378) as well as in invective against variety of people (EA 85, 130, 134, 137, 281).<sup>38</sup> Egyptian usage of ‘dog’ as a metaphor tends to be positive.<sup>39</sup> The Hebrew Bible mostly uses *כלב* as a put-down of others (Deut 23:18; 1 Sam 17:43; 2 Sam 16:9; Pss 22:17[16], 21[20]; Is 56:10-11) or of oneself (1 Sam 24:15[14]; 2 Sam 3:8). But *כלב* is used formulaically to express thanks (*מה עבדך כי פנית אליהכלב המת אשר כמוני*; 2 Sam 9:8) and surprise in 2 Kgs 8:13 (*מה עבדך הכלב כי*).<sup>40</sup> The context of *מי עבדך כלב כי* in the Lachish letters most closely parallels that of 2 Sam 9:8.

<sup>35</sup> For *מי עבדך כלב כי* as thanks in *Lachish 2*, see Pardee et al, “Overview,” p. 339; Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 80; and Na’aman, “Distribution,” p. 176 (using *Lachish 5*). For *מי עבדך כלב כי* as criticism in *Lachish 2*, see G. W. Coats, “Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas,” *JBL* 89 (1972), p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 67. Giving thanks in terms of incurring a debt is found, e.g. in Ps 116:12-19.

<sup>37</sup> The most comprehensive survey is that in D. W. Thomas, “Kelebh “Dog”: Its Origin and Some Usages of it in the Old Testament,” *VT* 10 (1960), pp. 410-427, who ultimately argues that *כלב* means ‘temple servant’. This meaning is included in D. J. A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew Vol. 4* (Sheffield, 1998), p. 415.

<sup>38</sup> In expressions of loyalty, the formulaic statements are similar to *מי עבדך כלב כי*. For the texts, see Moran, *Amarna Letters*.

<sup>39</sup> José M. Galán, “What is He, the Dog,” *UF* 25 (1993), pp. 173-180.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Surprise’ could be considered a variation of thanks. The similarity of the 2 Kgs 8:13 formula with the Lachish formula raises the issue whether there are differing traditions or free variation. Coats, “Self-abasement,” pp. 19, 26, notes that the difference between self-abasement and invective is purely to whom the formula refers.

## Variation in language and subject matter

The above discussion on *מי עבדך כלב כי* in Lachish 2, 5 and 6 indicates conventional language in the letters can vary according to topic or subject matter. *מי עבדך כלב כי* is only used when the senders thank Ya'osh, especially for letters he has forwarded on to them (Lachish 5, 6, 12[?]). This context suggests that the formula is a conventional expression to indicate gratitude by humbling one's self to the giver. It is impossible to determine how conventional the formula was for expressing thanks in biblical period Israel, but the similar context in 2 Sam 9:8 and form of expression in 2 Kgs 8:13 suggest it was widely known and used.

In contrast to the use of *מי עבדך כלב כי*, the variations in the greeting wishes of the letters generally show no connection with subject matter.

| Letter    | Greeting wish                                      |
|-----------|--|
| Lachish 2 | ישמע יהוה את אדני שמעת שלם עת כים עת כים           |
| Lachish 3 | ישמע יהוה את אדני שמעת שלם ושמעת טב <sup>41</sup>  |
| Lachish 4 | ישמע יהוה את אדני עת כים שמעת טב                   |
| Lachish 5 | ישמע יהוה [את אד]ני שמעת [של]ם וטב [עת כימ עת כי]ם |
| Lachish 6 | ירא יהוה את אדוני את העת הזה שלם                   |
| Lachish 8 | ישמע יהוה את אדני שמעת טב עת כים עת כים            |
| Lachish 9 | ישמע יהוה את אדני ש[מעת] שלם ו[טב]                 |

**Table 1: Greeting wish forms in the Lachish letters**

Table 1 shows that all greeting wishes, except for that in Lachish 6, follow a similar pattern. They start with *ישמע יהוה את אדני*,<sup>42</sup> followed by *שמעת שלם* (omitted in Lachish 4 and 8), and then by variations in use and order of *עת כים*, *שמעת טב*, and *וטב*. The greeting in Lachish 6 is clearly different. Lachish 5 has the most additions and repetitions (assuming the restorations are correct), but the letter is routine: thanks, sending back letters, and a simple request.

<sup>41</sup> *ישמע יהוה את אדני שמעת טב* involves restoration of the text (not indicated because proposals vary). Opinion is divided whether the vav is the beginning of a *ועת* ('and now') formula that introduces the body of the letter (so Gibson, *Textbook*, pp. 39-40; Albright, "Palestinian Inscriptions," p. 322; contrast his restoration in W. F. Albright, "A Reëxamination of the Lachish Letters", *BASOR* 73 [1939], pp. 17-19) or continues the greeting wish (so Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, pp. 309-310; Pardee, *Handbook*, pp. 84-85; S. Ahituv, *HaKetav VeHaMiktav* [Jerusalem, 2005], pp. 58-60).

<sup>42</sup> The use of *ישמע* (Hiphil) as part of a greeting is unique to the Lachish letters in comparison to other ancient Hebrew writing. See Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 81; and Pardee et al, "Overview," p. 335. Note the clash of person of the redundant *שמעת* (second person) with *אדני* (third person in function), indicating that the sender is addressing Ya'osh directly with the wish. Clashes of person involving honorifics are common in biblical Hebrew when the co-referent to a deferential nominal is in a subordinate clause (the case here) or vice-versa (Revell, *Designation*, p. 268).



Lachish 4 and 9 both have the fewest, but Lachish 9 is a routine request for supplies; yet Lachish 4 deals with an issue of non-compliance (a potentially face threatening situation for both sender and Ya'osh). Of the middle-length wishes, Lachish 2 is a simple letter of thanks; yet Lachish 3 involves criticism of Ya'osh; and Lachish 8 seems to refer to matters wider than the immediate area: Achzib is mentioned and possibly Moab.<sup>43</sup>

It is specifically the variations in form of the greeting wishes that encourage speculation as to multiple authorship or scribal activity. However, since Lachish 2, 6-8 and 18 are sherds from the same vessel, they could have been sent by the same person. Therefore, variation in style by an individual cannot be automatically discounted. Of these letters, Lachish 2 and 8 have very similar greeting wishes (the only variation is the swapping of *שמעת שלם* and *שמעת טב*), but as just noted, the subject matters are varied. But Lachish 6 has a completely different formula ('May YHWH cause my lord to see this season [in] peace'), which, however, can be argued to correlate with the subject matter in that letter. This is the only extant letter of the corpus that makes comments on politics. The sender is critical of the nobility and requests Ya'osh to send a letter to likewise criticise them. The use of *ירא* and *העת הזה* in the greeting wish suits: instead of the usual wish for Ya'osh's individual *שלם*, the sender wishes for a wider peace.<sup>44</sup> If the sender was the same person who sent Lachish 2 and 8, then the possibility becomes more secure that a sender can adjust greeting wishes to subject matter, even if he normally prefers a set convention. In sum, the greeting wishes (a form of conventional politeness) seem to reflect personal preference at the time of writing (but see on Lachish 4 below). However, the changed form in Lachish 6 also shows that on occasion, a sender will adjust convention to suit subject matter.

The biggest variation in language on the basis of subject matter occurs in the use of *עבדך-אדני* deference in the bodies of the letters. Generally, there is a considerable use of deference in the letters. High use appears in Lachish 2 and 5 (both routine letters) and in the fragmentary 12, 17 and 18. Moderate use appears in Lachish 9 and in the fragmentary Lachish 8, and a lesser use in Lachish 4. As discussed above, *עבדך-אדני* deference indicates the senders' awareness of Ya'osh's authority to direct them, and that impinging on him is a serious matter. The letters

<sup>43</sup> So Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 326; Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 104. Pardee (p.104) also notes that 'Achzib' could also be the first person singular of *כזב* 'to lie'.

<sup>44</sup> C.f. Smelik, *Writings*, p. 131: 'The wish that the writer expresses at the beginning was certainly not fulfilled. There were no tidings of peace and the anxiety which the writer had was not without justification.'

show that all senders respect this. But Lachish 3 and 6 also show that the degree of deference can vary considerably, and according to subject matter.

In Lachish 6, when the sender discusses politics (lines 5-15) deference reduces considerably. In his comments on the letters of the nobility that Ya'osh has forwarded to him, the second-person address appears at the expense of the deferential *אדני ידיך* (l.6, 'your hands') and *הלֹא תכתב* in his request for Ya'osh to write a letter of criticism (ll.8-9). First-person address appears with *אנכי* placed in apposition to *אדני* (l.8). Politeness theory argues that direct address normally indicates that the speaker and hearer agree that a subject matter is urgent, or the speaker has considerable power over the hearer, or the face threat is small.<sup>45</sup> But such language can be used in other situations: when social distance between interactants is small (e.g. between friends, even if from different social strata; c.f. 1 Sam 20:1-23); when people are agitating for change;<sup>46</sup> and when a speaker unilaterally considers the subject matter to be urgent or is emotionally involved in it.<sup>47</sup> In Lachish 6, the change to a more direct form of address represents emotion: the sender is upset with the nobility, and shows it in how he writes. Expressing emotion reflects openness with Ya'osh, shown also by the request that he write the letter to the nobility. It would seem that the sender considers himself to have a measure of reciprocity with Ya'osh. Politeness, however, is not entirely abandoned. *עבדך-אדני* deference remains present (*אדני* is used in l.8 and *עבדך* twice in ll.13-15). The request to write, *הלֹא תכתב*, a command in the form of a question,<sup>48</sup> is a negative politeness strategy called 'hedging'.<sup>49</sup> It gives Ya'osh freedom to choose whether to take up the advice, and thus keep face.

There is a similar reduced amount of deference in Lachish 3:10-13, in Hosha'yahu's criticism of Ya'osh for inferring he cannot read and defence of his reading ability. If anything, the change from *עבדך-אדני* deference to direct address is more marked than that in Lachish 6. The

<sup>45</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 69. In the Lachish letters, the 'speaker' is the sender and the 'hearer' is the recipient.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g. L. Josephides, "Disengagement and Desire: The Tactics of Everyday Life", *American Ethnologist* 26 (1999), pp. 139-159: a study using politeness theory of how young Kewa women in Papua New Guinea try to change aspects of their tribal culture.

<sup>47</sup> For biblical examples, see 2 Sam 19:6-8 (urgency); and 2 Sam 3:24-25 and 1 Kgs 3:17-20 (emotion). 2 Sam 3:24-25 and 19:6-8 also includes criticism. In Gen 44:34, an emotional first-person appeal concludes a lengthy and highly deferential speech.

<sup>48</sup> *לֹא* coupled with the jussive functions as the command, 'do not ....' *ה* functions as an interrogative. The result is that the question functions as a positive request.

<sup>49</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 131.

extended salutation sets a tone of formality to the letter, and עבדך is used consistently in ll.5-8, his introduction to his criticism and self-defence, and then from line 1.13 onwards, when he engages in routine reporting. However, אדני is used less frequently than would be expected in ll.5-8, being replaced with two verbs in the second-person in (שלהך; שלחתה)<sup>50</sup> ll.6-7) as Hosha'yahu introduces his complaint. But the imperative-request, הפקח נא את אזן [ עבדך ] ('open [Hiphil] the ear of your servant ...'; ll.4-5), contains the particle נא, the only occurrence of it in the extant letters, which should be understood as indicating politeness.<sup>51</sup> In his criticism and self-defence proper, Hosha'yahu dispenses with deference completely, replacing it with first-person references (ll.9-13; e.g. לי [1.10], קראתי [1.12]). It is clear that Hosha'yahu is emotional about his superior's inference that he cannot read, and his change in language is in accord with what has been discussed for Lachish 6:5-12: emotion will reduce customary politeness. The only thing that mitigates his criticism of Ya'osh is that he keeps it entirely in the first person. That is, his criticism of Ya'osh is indirect, which shows respect for him.

Lachish 4 shows a departure from the normal highly deferential style of the other extant letters. Outside of the greeting wish and an introductory statement of compliance (ועת ככל אשר ) שלח אדני כן עשה עבדך; 'And now, according to all which my lord has sent, your servant has done'; ll.2-3), the sender consistently uses אדני for Ya'osh but without a corresponding consistent use of עבדך for himself. Instead, the first person appears in all topics: כתבתי (1.3) in a general statement of compliance; איני (ll.7-8) in the matter of Semakyahu; and נראה and נחננו (ll.10-11) in the matter of signals. עבדך in reference to the sender appears only once (1.7). My analysis for the non-use of deference in the otherwise deferential Lachish 3 and 6 suggests that the sender of Lachish 4 is expressing emotion. If so, my analysis supports those interpretations of this difficult-to-interpret letter that suggest Semakyahu has been arrested and taken to Jerusalem to face trial and the sender has to send a witness (ll.6-9),<sup>52</sup> and/or Azekah has fallen to the Babylonians (ll.11-12).<sup>53</sup> Either interpretation explains the possibility of the sender being emotional. But it may be that Semakyahu was simply required by Ya'osh

<sup>50</sup> Second-person perfect and infinitive with second-person suffix respectively.

<sup>51</sup> See above, n. 29. If Christiansen's analysis of נא in biblical narrative can be applied to the Lachish letters ("Linguistic," p. 392), it shows Hosha'yahu draws attention to his softening of his imperative-request.

<sup>52</sup> Smelik, *Writings*, p. 125; Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 91; Gibson, *Textbook*, pp. 41-42; Albright, personal communication, in F. M. Cross, "Lachish Letter IV", *BASOR* 144 (1956), p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> Di Vito, "Lachish Letters," p. 128; Cross, "Lachish Letter IV," p. 25; J. Reider, "The Lachish Letters", *JQR* 29 (1939), pp. 235-236.

but seems to have been commandeered for a short period of time by a certain Shema'yahu.<sup>54</sup> That is, ll.7-8 is essentially a routine statement. There is also a recent consensus of opinion that ll.2-3, a report about watching for signals from Lachish, is also routine (that is, testing a signal system).<sup>55</sup> These two interpretations suggest that Lachish 4 is a routine letter, and so the sender should not be more emotional than his peers. If so, then the language of the letter reflects the individuality of the sender.

But the introductory statement of compliance in ll.2-3 and the use of עבדך in conjunction with אינני in l.7 suggest the letter carries some emotion. When compared to the other letters, they reflect customary politeness. That is, the sender knows the conventional language to use for his superior. But in the context of Lachish 4's 'less polite' language, they indicate emphasis: the statement of compliance emphasises he has fully complied with his superior's directives, despite the problems with Semakyahu; and אינני emphasises his own decision concerning Semakyahu.<sup>56</sup> In politeness terms, they address any loss of face to Ya'osh by the sender's non-compliance in the matter of Semakyahu. But the emphasis they give to the sender's reports, along with the need for the sender to state that he has written a formal report ( כתבתי על ), 'I have written on the tablet everything which [you] sent to me' [ll.3-4]), suggests that the sender is worried about how his superior will respond to his report. The swapping of שמעת שלם for שמעת טב in the greeting wish and its placement at the end of the wish may also reflect the sender's worry. Instead of the usual polite concern with Ya'osh's well-being, the sender anticipates his message by focusing on his superior's desire for 'good [news]', which is not fully fulfilled in his report.

The introductory statement of ll.2-3 and use of עבדך in l.7 also hint that the sender's use of עבדך-אדני deference in them has moved beyond convention to portraying him as submissive to his superior. This draws upon an aspect of slavery in which slaves are subject to their master

<sup>54</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 315; Begin, "Letter 4," p. 172; Cross, "Lachish Letter IV," p. 25; C. H. Gordon, "Lachish Letter IV" *BASOR* 67 [1937], p. 32; Torczyner, *Lachish I*, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> Begin, "Letter 4," p. 171, followed by Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 316. See also Smelik, *Writings*, p. 127; Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 94-95; Gibson, *Textbook*, p. 43; and implied earlier in Gordon, "Lachish Letter IV," p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> For עבדך-אדני indicating emphasis, see Dobbs-Allsopp et al, *Hebrew Inscriptions*, p. 315; Smelik, *Writings*, p. 125; Albright, "Palestinian Inscriptions," p. 322; Cross, "Lachish Letter IV," p. 25. Others omit translating אינני (e.g. Pardee, *Handbook*, p. 91; Gibson, *Textbook*, p. 42) or translate in such a way that אינני is separated from עבדך (e.g. Begin, "Letter 4," p. 172 [עבדך refers to Semakyahu]; Gordon, "Lachish Letter IV," p.32 [עבדך is the sender's self-designation and אינני forms part of a request to be sent to get Semakyahu]).

and by implication, must obey them (c.f. Prov 29:19).<sup>57</sup> This movement beyond mere convention shows why master-slave deference is a politeness strategy: any potential loss to the hearer or recipient's face in a communication event is redressed by portraying him as the one in power. The corollary is that the potential face-loss is placed on the speaker or sender.

## Conclusion

The extant Lachish letters are generally very polite. This is expressed in two key ways: Conventional greeting wishes,<sup>58</sup> and master-slave deference. The former show politeness by focussing on the recipient's (assumed to be Ya'osh in all extant letters) interests. His desires for well-being and good reports from his subordinates are recognised and expressed. This conventional sentiment matches with the senders' deference: Ya'osh is their superior and so it can be assumed that he will want to know that his subordinates are interested in his concerns. Deference works by indicating the power relationship between the senders and Ya'osh (they are inferior to him in status), as well as providing a sense of formal distancing in their relationship. That is, the senders recognise they are in a 'work' relationship with their superior.

Other forms of politeness are found in the letters. A self-abasement formula, *מי עבדך כלב כי* (Lachish 2, 5, 6 and possibly 12) is used to express thanks. It builds on the conventional master-slave deference by exaggerating the inferior status of the senders to Ya'osh, which occurs by them humbling their own face for favour received. Such exaggeration allows them to avoid being indebted to Ya'osh for favour received (reading forwarded letters) by implying he is a generous person. In Lachish 6, politeness is also evidenced by the sender's use of a question for a request that Ya'osh intervene in the nation's politics, despite reducing conventional master-slave deference due to emotion about the matter.

The use of the *מי עבדך כלב כי* for thanks, the reduction or abandonment of master-slave deference in Lachish 3 and 6 for direct address due to emotion, and the unique greeting wish of Lachish 6, show that senders can vary their language, including conventional formulae and

<sup>57</sup> For discussion on the use of *מי עבדך* for deference in biblical texts with the implications of subjection and loyalty/obedience, see Bridge, "Loyalty," pp. 372-374, and Ringgren et al, "עֶבֶד," pp. 392-393.

<sup>58</sup> This is added to in Lachish 2 (2:5-6) and Lachish 5 (5:7-9) by the use of an extra wish.

other expressions, according to subject matter. This is also the case for Lachish 4, where the use of אֲדָנִי-‘I’ language represents worry because directives have not been met, and the customary עֲבָדָךְ-אֲדָנִי language takes the role of emphasising that the sender has been obedient to his superior’s directives.

To summarise, the language use in the Lachish letters reflects a culture of high politeness to a formal superior, but this culture is not restrictive. It permits subordinates to be free to express their opinion and even critique their superior, and do so with the use of direct speech.

Whether this way of interaction between formal superiors and subordinates was widespread in late monarchic Judah cannot be ascertained fully due to a lack of information, but it can be compared with the respectful address found in the many relative status contexts in the Hebrew Bible. A cursory comparison shows that the Lachish letters are more polite in terms of master-slave deference than most narrated speech in the Bible. Most narrated speech contains אֲדָנִי-‘I’ deference (e.g. 1 Sam 15:24-26; 28:21-22; 2 Sam 15:7-8; 1 Kgs 3:16-22; Jer 37:17-20). The same is the case for prayer. In Psalms, for example, the first person is more frequently used in contexts of supplication than עֲבָד as a term of deference.<sup>59</sup> However, biblical texts also witness to a culture of a high use of deference towards social superiors (e.g. Gen 44:18-34; 2 Sam 14:22; 1 Kgs 20:39-40; 2 Kgs 5:15-18) and towards God in some prayers (2 Sam 7:18-29; Neh 1:5-11). One area of language use between the Lachish letters and biblical texts that matches well is the variation of master-slave deference on the basis of subject matter/emotion. In narrated speech in which such deference is frequent, the language varies with topic/emotion, similar to what has been found for the Lachish letters (e.g. Gen 44:34; 1 Sam 25:29-30; 2 Sam 14:13-14). That is, the Hebrew Bible witnesses to a culture of high politeness towards social superiors, yet with freedom to express opinion and critique them, with the direct address this commonly entails. The Lachish letters affirm this is the case.

However, as has been shown in my study, there is more to respectful language than deference. Many of the above listed biblical texts will reveal various strategies of politeness that will assist in interpretation of how the speeches and prayers work rhetorically. Both the variation

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<sup>59</sup> This is also the case in Ezra 9, Neh 9, and Dan 9. In Psalms, עֲבָד is used as a term of deference 33 times, with 13 occurrences in Ps 119 alone. See Bridge, “Loyalty,” pp. 361-364; and Ringgren et al, “עֲבָד,” 393.

in deferential language according to content and the use of other polite forms of language are both matters worth exploring further.

### Further comments

Since submitting this paper for publication, the article by Benjamin Thomas, ‘The Language of Politeness in ancient Hebrew Letters’ appeared.<sup>60</sup> I have briefly commented on this article in Chapter 2.3.4, and it is gratifying to note that it, along with Estelle’s 2006 article,<sup>61</sup> represents some interest in the use of politeness theory in biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies. As noted in Chapter 2.3.4, Thomas takes a similar approach to his analysis of the Arad, Kuntillet ’Ajrud and Lachish letters as I do; that is, identifying politeness strategies in the letters. His focus in doing this is to relate them to the social relationships between senders and recipients and the context of writing. A key difference is that he focuses extensively on the role of epistolary prescripts, which reflects a major focus of scholarship in epistolography. But his analysis has the value of considering variations in prescript formulae as having something to do with context rather than assuming they represent different scribal traditions. He also notes the possibility, as Pardee and I do, that imperatives in letters addressed to superiors may not necessarily be impolite (e.g. Arad 18). He also notes the social context of the Arad letters varies considerably from the Lachish letters, giving rise to the possibility of regional variations in polite communication.

In some matters, Thomas is at variance to my analysis of the Lachish letters. For example, Thomas considers the ‘dog’ self-abasive formula to be an example of ‘in-group’ language, despite saying that dogs were considered as unclean in Israelite society.<sup>62</sup> This seems contradictory and does not dissuade me from my interpretation of the formula as a form of extreme deference which widens the social distance between sender and recipient. A weakness in Thomas’ argument is his non-reference to Coats (‘Self-Abasement’), Thomas (‘Kelebh “Dog”’), and Hutton (‘“Abdi-Aširta, the Slave, the Dog”’<sup>63</sup>). Of the bodies of the Lachish

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<sup>60</sup> Benjamin Thomas, ‘The Language of Politeness in Ancient Hebrew Letters’, *HS* 50 (2009) 17-39.

<sup>61</sup> Bryan Estelle, ‘The Use of Deferential Language in the Arsames Correspondence and Biblical Aramaic Compared’, *Maarav* 13:1 (2006) 43-76.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, ‘Language,’ 30-31.

<sup>63</sup> Jeremy M. Hutton, ‘“Abdi-Aširta, the Slave, the Dog”: Self-Abasement and Invective in the Amarna letters, the Lachish Letters, and 2 Sam 3:8’, *ZA* 15/16 (2002/2003) 2-18. Hutton’s focus is to offer an alternative translation and interpretation of 2 Sam 3:8, in which Abner uses the dog formula, from what is currently argued for.

letters, Thomas only deals with Lachish 3. In contrast to my argument of Hosha'yahu's language in this letter and the majority of scholarship, Thomas argues Hosha'yahu remains circumspect throughout the letter, using נא and עבדך in ll.5-8 as evidence. But Thomas has not noted that deference has decreased in ll.5-8 from the first part of the letter and what is typical in the Lachish corpus, and is absent in ll.9-13, in Hosha'yahu's criticism proper. There is no doubt that Hosha'yahu is circumspect on the whole, but it is found by his use of avoidance of the second person (i.e. Hosha'yahu indirectly criticises his superior), not by his use of 'heart' and 'ear', which are typical ways of speaking in the Hebrew Bible. In effect, Thomas has not focussed enough on the bodies of the Lachish letters to be aware that politeness will change according to immediate subject matter. Like ancient epistolography scholarship in general, Thomas has yet to recognise that ancient writers could vary their language *within* the body of a letter.<sup>64</sup>

#### 5.4. CONCLUSIONS

The first article, 'Polite Israel,' concluded that politeness theory is an appropriate heuristic tool for the analysis of biblical texts, though expresses caution about the problem of the lack of social data that can inform analyses using the theory. The application of the theory to Israel's request to travel through Edom's territory (Num 20:14-21) affirms the biblical portrayal of Edom as the rude 'bad brother' to Israel, only concerned with his own wants. Edom's *bald-on-record* language is correct for the role given to him in the text, but yet he is still unreasonable.

The second article, 'Politeness in the Lachish Letters', provides some material requested in the conclusion of 'Polite Israel': social data from the biblical period that might confirm the biblical portrayal of social inferiors using polite language to social superiors, including master-slave deference. The biblical portrayal is affirmed as reflecting the culture of the times in its portrayal of language use. The article also affirms that language use varies with subject matter (particularly reflecting emotion about subject matter), a matter little studied at present.

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However, he indicates that the formula normally expresses loyalty and heightens relative social rank, a view similar to mine.

<sup>64</sup> Jon Hall, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero's Letters* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) is an exception, in analysing how Cicero combined polite expressions, frequently of a positive politeness form, with direct language as he negotiated the difficult social and political networks of elite Roman society.



This both affirms the usefulness of politeness theory for analysing biblical texts and that variation in politeness is to be expected in biblical texts as characters and worshippers speak and pray, matters covered in Chapters 6-8.

Having now affirmed the usefulness of politeness theory in analysis of biblical texts, and presented some social data that affirm the biblical portrayal of people and prayer, analysis can now turn to the use of slavery terms in speaking and praying, to determine its use in polite speech and what associations, if any, with slavery that may be evoked in that use.



**CHAPTER 6**  
**DEFERENTIAL LANGUAGE IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE PART 1:**  
**1 SAM 25 AND 2 SAM 14:1-22: THE ‘SLAVE’ IS THE ‘MASTER’**

**6.1. INTRODUCTION**

Now that politeness theory is found to be useable for biblical (and extra-biblical) texts, attention can be turned to biblical texts that contain metaphoric use of master-slave language. For this, politeness theory will be used in combination with metaphor theory and, where appropriate, narrative theory. The first genre of text chosen is narrative, because of its portrayal of characters speaking and praying. As Chapter 5.3 has shown, this portrayal is in keeping with how ancient Israelites spoke to social superiors. The texts chosen for analysis reflect two types of narrative: narrative in the Historical Books (or Deuteronomistic History), and narrative in the Pentateuch. The texts chosen indicate how master-slave deference, along with other polite language forms, work in biblical literature. Essentially, master-slave deference is part of conventional politeness, does not always imply servility to the hearer, and is part of a character’s identity construction which is designed to assist the purpose of that character’s speaking.

This chapter (Chapter 6) analyses two texts from 1 and 2 Samuel. These two books contain extensive dialogues and speaking, some of which contain significant identity construction by characters. Chapter 7 covers most texts in which speaking and dialogue occurs in Genesis 12-50. Discussion on prayer is included, which prepares for Chapter 8, in which the Psalms and other prayers are analysed.

In this chapter, the first text chosen is 1 Sam 25. Here, David speaks to Nabal, and Abigail to David, both using master-slave deference. The text is significant because Abigail is portrayed as the master of the situation, despite her use of deference. As politeness theory will show, both her and David’s language is by nature ambiguous. The application of metaphor, politeness and narrative theory helps to choose between competing interpretations of the text, as well as indicate what identity is constructed by the two characters to achieve their purposes.

The second text, 2 Sam 14:1-22, is important because the ambiguous nature of polite language is exploited by the narrator as part of the plot. Joab uses a wise woman to present a fictitious

case to King David, which is eventually dropped to reveal the true matter. Here, respectful language is used in the context of deception, and then has to redress the deception once it is exposed.<sup>1</sup>

## **6.2. DEFERENTIAL LANGUAGE IN 1 SAMUEL 25: DAVID AND ABIGAIL**

### **6.2.1. Introduction**

Since the rise of current literary and narrative criticism, there has been a long-standing interest in the portrayal of David as a character in the Samuel narratives. 1 Samuel 25 has been an integral part of this interest, no doubt due to the portrayal of David in a murderous frame of mind. Focus has been on the intertextuality of this passage with 1 Samuel 24 and 26 which surround it;<sup>2</sup> intertextuality with the wider narrative of 1 and 2 Samuel;<sup>3</sup> intertextuality with other biblical books, especially Genesis;<sup>4</sup> and a counter-reading of the portrayal of David.<sup>5</sup> The result of such interest and foci has shown that David and Abigail are modelled on the patriarchs, Nabal is an analogy for Saul,<sup>6</sup> and 1 Sam 25 introduces an ominous portrayal of

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<sup>1</sup> C.f. 2 Sam 16:1-4, in which Ziba deceives David about Mephibosheth; 2 Sam 19:24-30, in which Mephibosheth has to redress what has Ziba has said about him; and 2 Sam 19:31-39, in which Barzillai deals with offence caused by rejecting an offer by David.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Robert P. Gordon, 'David's Rise and Saul's Demise: Narrative Analogy in 1 Sam 24-26', *TB* 31 (1980) 37-64; David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSS 14; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) 96-101; Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part 2: 1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 205-215; Barbara Green, 'Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul', *BI* 11 (2003) 1-23; and van Ellen J. Wolde, 'A Leader led by a Lady: David and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25', *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 114 (2002) 355-375.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Lozovyy, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal and "the Son of Jesse": Readings in 1 Samuel 16-25* (LHB/OTS 497; New York, London: T&T Clark, 2009); Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim 1985) 123-124, 129-130; John Kessler, 'Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel', *CBQ* 62 (2000) 409-423; Diana V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOTSS 121; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 204-221; Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); David Bosworth, *The Story within a Story in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* (CBQMS 45; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008) (1 Sam 25 represents David's relationship with Saul's House, through the literary technique of *mise-en-abyme*).

<sup>4</sup> Mark E. Biddle, 'Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization', *JBL* 121 (2002) 617-638; Peter D. Miscall, 'Literary Unity in Old Testament Narrative', *Semeia* 15 (1979) 35-38. Garsiel, *Samuel*, 124-126, 130-132.

<sup>5</sup> Jon D. Levenson, '1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History', *CBQ* 40 (1978) 11-28; Jon D. Levenson, Baruch Halpern, 'The Political Import of David's Marriages', *JBL* 99 (1980) 507-518; Polzin, *Samuel* (and especially pp.266-268 for citations of other works not normally cited by others); Biddle, 'Ancestral,' 634-635; Edelman, *King Saul*, 207-210. See also Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990) 174-175.

<sup>6</sup> This is now a near universal consensus. See, e.g. Gordon, 'David's Rise,' 43-51; Lozovyy, *Saul*, 153-158; Green, 'Enacting,' 21; Biddle, 'Ancestral Motifs,' 623-626; Garsiel, *Samuel*, 129; Edelman, *King Saul*, 206; Polzin, *Samuel*, 205; Miscall, 'Literary Unity,' 37; David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam; Collegeville: Liturgical

David that prepares for the events narrated in 2 Sam 11.<sup>7</sup> On this last point, it is now often affirmed that David came to the throne through intrigue, murder or otherwise eliminating opposition to his ambition.<sup>8</sup>

However, despite this interest in David and in 1 Samuel 25, the role that deference plays in the characters' speeches has received minimal attention.<sup>9</sup> When attention is given to it, it is recognised that Abigail speaks deferentially to David, even effusively; and that David's self-reference, *ולבנך לדוד*, when speaking to Nabal (v.8) is important in the narrative because of Nabal's rejection of it. David's use of *עבדיך* to denote his men is less commonly discussed, but is recognised to be the impetus for Nabal's comment, *רבו עבדים המתפרצים* (v.10). It is also recognised that David's three-fold mention of *שלום* in v.6 is courteous language, as is Abigail's frequent use of *אמתך* (25:24, 25, 28, 31, 41), along with *שפחתך* (vv.27, 41) and *אדני*, to David. However, the three Hebrew terms for female servant being placed together in vv.41-42 (*אמה*, *שפחה* and *נערה*) is overlooked. Such a placement gives rise to the possibility that there is a metaphorical play on the terms. David's use of *בן* and *עבדים* and Nabal's rejection of them

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Press, 1998) 92-93. See George G. Nichol, 'David, Abigail and Bathsheba, Nabal and Uriah: Transformations within a Triangle', *SJOT* 12 (1998) 135, for a contrary opinion: Nabal is a 'subject that must choose between Saul and David'.

<sup>7</sup> Levenson and Halpern, 'Political Import,' 514; Adele Berlin, 'Characterisation in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives', *JSOT* 23 (1982) 69-85; Nichol, 'David,' 130-145.

<sup>8</sup> Levenson, '1 Samuel 25,' 23-24, reaffirmed in Levenson and Halpern, 'Political Import,' 516-518 and expressed most clearly in Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). See also Niels P. Lemche, 'David's Rise', *JSOT* 10 (1978) 2-25; Stanley Isser, *The Sword of Goliath: David in Heroic Literature* (SBL SBL 6; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Marti J. Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power* (SPOT; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Thomas R. Preston, 'The Heroism of Saul: Patterns of Meaning in the Narrative of the Early Kingship', *JSOT* 24 (1982) 27-46; Jack Cargill, 'David in History: A Secular Approach', *Judaism* 35 (1986) 211-222; F.H. Cryer, 'David's Rise to Power and the Death of Abner: An Analysis of 1 Samuel XXVI 14-16 and its Redactional-Critical Implications', *VT* 35 (1985) 385-394; James Vanderkam, 'Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal', *JBL* 99 (1980) 521-539; Keith Bodner, 'Is Joab a Reader-Response Critic?' *JSOT* 27 (2002) 19-35; Polzin, *Samuel*; Gunn, *Fate*; Miscall, 'Literary Unity'; Biddle, 'Ancestral,' 634-637. In contrast are Gordon, 'David's Rise,' 43-51, and Kessler, 'Sexuality,' 409-423. Robert Alter, 'Character in the Bible', *Commentary* 66:4 (1978) 58-65, [incorporated into *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), chapter 1], and *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1999) xvii-xix, while recognising a calculating side to David, prefers to understand him as an ambivalent character. Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (HBM 19; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008) 65, remains neutral.

<sup>9</sup> Exceptions to this trend are: P.Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 398, and Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 181, who both note that Abigail's actions and statements represent conventional courteous and respectful behaviour; Berlin, 'Characterisation,' 77, who recognises that Abigail's obsequiousness 'might be interpreted as correct etiquette, or the politic thing to do when trying to convince David not to harm her husband, but it is out of all proportion at the end of the story when David proposes marriage;' and Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1988) 151, who says, 'Though she [Abigail] speaks as a 'handmaid' to her lord, Abigail is master of the situation.' That is, Baldwin recognises that Abigail's language does not match the role she plays in the narrative.

(vv.8, 10) also plays on the metaphoricity of those terms. There has also been no systematic analysis as to how David and Abigail's deferential language adds to the narrator's portrayal of them.

The lack of systematic study on deference in 1 Samuel 25 and the narrator's use of servant terms also results in inadequate interpretations. For example, Edelman interprets Abigail's use of אמתך and שפחתך as indicating sexual desire towards David; Biddle argues that the change from נערים to מלאכים/עבדים for David's men in vv.41-42 is a projection of David's later royal status onto 1 Sam 25; Lipiński argues that אמתך means 'wife'; and there is occasional comment that Abigail is portrayed as queen-like, by having five נערות (v.42) attend her.<sup>10</sup>

A close analysis of both deferential language in 1 Samuel 25 and other polite/respectful language elements will help avoid such inadequate interpretations, help choose between competing interpretations, show how such language adds to the narrator's portrayal of the characters in the narrative, as well as assist in determining how deferential language is used in biblical narratives. The use of metaphor and narrative theory also shows what latent associations with slavery are evoked by the use master-slave deference (played on twice: vv.10-11, 41) and how the characters are developed.

### **6.2.2. Analysis**

#### **6.2.2.1. DAVID'S REQUEST TO NABAL (25:5-9)**

David's message to Nabal requesting supplies (25:6-8) is sometimes acknowledged as polite and respectful.<sup>11</sup> But little systematic analysis is given to indicate why. Comments are usually restricted to David's greeting of שלום to Nabal and his house and David's use of עבדיך and בנך. These terms, though recognised as 'polite', are also recognised as being important to the narrative: David as 'son' and his men as 'servants' are rejected by Nabal, and David's threefold offer of שלום is counterbalanced by the threefold mention of חרב in v.13. Thus the message and Nabal's response starts the plot. However, the use of a greeting wish, despite

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<sup>10</sup> In sequence: Edelman, *King Saul*, 214; Biddle, 'Ancestral,' 622-623; for Abigail as queen-like, see Bodner, *I Samuel*, 271; Ralph Klein, *I Samuel* (WBC 10; Milton Keynes: Word, 1986) 252; Édouard Lipiński, 'Kinship Terminology in 1 Sam 25.40-42', *ZA* 7 (1994) 15-16; and Biddle, 'Ancestral,' 623. Against these interpretations is Miscall, *I Samuel*, 152-153, who gives a rare full discussion of the deferential language in 1 Sam 25.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g. David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 580; van Wolde, 'Leader,' 358; Gunn, *Fate*, 96; Garsiel, *Samuel*, 126.

being a convention for opening communication,<sup>12</sup> is the politeness strategy, ‘noticing and attending to the hearer’ (Chapter 2.3.1, Table 1). Its intention is to claim common ground with Nabal by working on the natural desire for peace and well-being. By doing this, the possibility of communication has been created. The exact form of the wish, *לחי ואתה שלום*, is unique in the Hebrew Bible, but Tsumura draws attention to a similar formulation in an Akkadian text (*KTU* 1.161:31-34) and that *וביתך שלום* is part of the greeting in *Arad* 16.2 (*ולשלם ביתך*).<sup>13</sup> *לחי* (untranslated in the NRSV) also adds to the strategy of ‘noticing and attending to the hearer’ by wishing long life to Nabal.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the message (v.8b), David concludes with two deferential terms: *בנך* (‘your son’) and *עבדיך* (‘your servants’). The former represents the politeness strategy, ‘claim in-group membership with the hearer’. In the Bible, this is frequently done with the use of familial terms. Such a strategy claims ‘common ground’ with the hearer; that is, David in his message perceives himself, ‘for the purpose of the interaction, as somehow similar’ to Nabal.<sup>15</sup> By doing this, David claims his request should be seen as reasonable amongst intimates. David has already used *אבי* to Saul in 1 Sam 24:11 and received the response *בני* in 24:16, which continues in 26:17, 21 and 25. Therefore, his language is not unusual, except that he has no formal relationship with Nabal. Nabal parodies this in his response (25:10-11).

The same is the case for David’s use of *עבדיך* for his men: he has used *עבדך* of himself to Saul in 17:34, 36 and will use it again in 26:18; and Jonathan has used it of him to Saul in 19:4. There is a difference, however, between David’s uses of *עבד* to Saul and to Nabal: David uses it only for his men in his message to Nabal. This is continued in the narrative when Abigail mentions her gift of food in 25:27: she states it is given to David’s *נערים*. The deferential use of *עבד* relates to the primary purpose of deference: to create social distance between speaker

<sup>12</sup> Noted in Baldwin, *Samuel*, 148.

<sup>13</sup> Tsumura, *Samuel*, 580. For *Arad* 16, see Yohanan Aharoni, *Arad inscriptions* (trans. Judith Ben-Or; ed. & rev. by Anson F. Rainey; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981) 30 (*ed. princeps*); and Shmuel Ahituv, *HaKetav VeHaMiktav* (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Biblica, 2005) 104-105 (Hebrew). The same expression, *ולשלם ביתך*, appears as part of the greeting in *Arad* 21.2.

<sup>14</sup> The translation of *לחי* is disputed. Tsumura argues it means ‘to my brothers’ because a vowel has dropped out. For discussion, see Tsumura, *Samuel*, 579, and McCarter, *I Samuel*, 392. Technical discussion is found in David T. Tsumura, ‘Vowel sandhi in Biblical Hebrew’, *ZAW* 109 (1997) 575-588; G.R. Driver, ‘A lost colloquialism ...’, *JTS* 8 (1957) 272-273; and D.J. Wiseman, ‘Is it Peace? - Covenant and Diplomacy’, *VT* 32 (1982) 318.

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 2.3.1, Table 2. Baldwin, *Samuel*, 148, correctly recognises that *עבדיך* and *בנך* is ‘the language of negotiation’.

and hearer, by making the hearer socially superior to the speaker.<sup>16</sup> The use of עַבֵּד suits this purpose admirably by drawing on the association of slavery, ‘possession’ and its derived association, ‘control’ (Chapter 3.2.2). David controls his men’s activities. By separating himself from his men in the request, David also claims that his request is for the benefit of his men (he cares for his ‘possession’), not himself, and so avoids implications of bribery.<sup>17</sup> Despite עַבֵּדִים creating social distance and בֶּן lessening social distance, both terms are also junior status terms and so work together to put Nabal clearly in the role of social superior.<sup>18</sup> This indicates that there may not be much difference in the meaning between בֶּן and עַבֵּד when used in relative status contexts.<sup>19</sup>

There are other forms of polite language in David’s message. Verse 7, which gives the reasons for the request (he has protected Nabal’s men and flocks), is recognised as appropriate, but also prompts the view that David has set up a protection racket.<sup>20</sup> Giving reasons for a request is commonplace, but such commonplaceness indicates it is a form of politeness. ‘Give reasons’ works by claiming reflexivity on the part of the hearer, which in turn is an attempt by the speaker to claim that he and the hearer are co-operators on the topic in question. This is the point of polite language: the speaker allows the hearer to respond in a way that saves face.<sup>21</sup> In this case Nabal’s face is saved if he accepts what is in effect a deal after the event:

<sup>16</sup> Chapter 2.3.1, Table 2. Deference works by showing the ‘P’ value (power difference) and ‘D’ value (distance) between the interactants in a communication event.

<sup>17</sup> Klein, *1 Samuel*, 251; Edelman, *King Saul*, 217; Levenson, *1 Samuel 25*, 19; Gunn, *Fate*, 96.

<sup>18</sup> Van Wolde, ‘Leader,’ 358, recognises correctly that David puts himself in the role of dependent to Nabal.

<sup>19</sup> C.f. 2 Kgs 16:7, where בֶּן and עַבֵּד are used together in a formal treaty context; and Arad 40, in which בָּנָם (‘your sons’) is used in the greeting (40.1), but אֲדֹנָי-עַבְדְּךָ deference is used for the rest of the letter (40.4, 6, 10) (Ahituv, *HaKetav*, 131; Aharoni, *Arad*, 71). Wiseman, ‘Peace,’ 318-319, argues that David’s use of ‘son’ means he wanted negotiate a formal covenant with Nabal, using both biblical and extra-biblical examples. While it is true that familial language is part of covenant language, this seems an over-reading for 1 Samuel 25. Such a view can only work if 1 Samuel 25 is viewed as a fiction to explain how the Calebite and Judah clans became identified together (e.g. Lozovvy, *Saul* 176-177; Levenson and Halpern, ‘Political Import,’ 509-523; Garsiel, *Samuel*, 127-128).

<sup>20</sup> Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 261, 264; Biddle, ‘Ancestral,’ 637; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 176; Levenson, ‘1 Samuel 25,’ 19; c.f. C.H. Gordon, G.A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1997) 189. It is noted as a possibility in Tsumura, *Samuel*, 580; George G. Nicol, ‘David, Abigail and Bathsheba, Nabal and Uriah: Transformations within a Triangle’, *SJOT* 12 (1998) 135, fn.18; Alter, *David Story*, 153; Edelman, *King Saul*, 19; Green, ‘Enacting,’ 397; and Baldwin, *Samuel*, 148-149. However, Baldwin ultimately argues against it (p.148): if David was attempting to extend political influence in the Hebron area, extorting Nabal would work against this unless Nabal was hated by the wider community. Edelman accepts the speech of Nabal’s workman in 25:15 to argue that a protection racket had not been set up (p. 211). van Wolde, ‘Leader,’ 358 argues that the request for favour and the use of humble language precludes David presenting a threat to Nabal.

<sup>21</sup> Chapter 2.3.1, Table 1. J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 2: The Crossing Fates* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986) 485-487, also recognises the importance of David’s reasons in supporting his request.



David has already done things for him and wants a response in kind. If no reasons had been given for the request, then the interpretation that David is extorting Nabal becomes a near certainty. Respect is also shown at the grammatical level in David's request (25:8c; נא). נא can be interpreted as a formal expression of politeness to soften the imperative.<sup>22</sup> The wording of the request is also open: David does not specify what he wants. This is another politeness strategy, 'be conventionally indirect', which allows Nabal discretion as to what he will give, if he so chooses to respond.<sup>23</sup> The risk that David faces for this polite language is that Nabal might not respond in the way he wants.

The politeness of David's message is also shown in its format. It is generally noted that the request is left to last, but the overall structure of the message is also similar to extra-biblical Hebrew letters dated to the early sixth century B.C.E. Texts such as Lachish 2-6, and Arad 16, 18, 21 and 40 all have a structure of greeting wish, transition marker ועת ("and now") and body.<sup>24</sup> Except for a double use of ועתה in v.7 (ועת with a *matres lectionis*), the same structure is used by David. This suggests, no matter the validity of politeness analysis, that David's message is portrayed as in keeping with what appears to be a conventional message format. David cannot be accused of rudeness.

However, in David's reasons, he uses an imperative (שאל) without נא followed by two jussives (ויגידו ... וימצאו): *Ask your young men that they may tell you and that (my) young men may find favour ...* (v.8a). The verbal sequence (imperative-jussive) indicates a nexus best

<sup>22</sup> Christo H.J. van der Merve, Jackie A. Naudé, Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) §19.4.1; Ahouva Shulman, 'The Particle נא in Biblical Hebrew Prose', *HS* 40 (1990) 67-74. See Bent Christiansen, 'A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Particle *nā*': A Test Case', *VT* 59 (2009) 392, who argues that the use of נא with an imperative highlights ('marks') for readers/hearers the politeness used. Timothy Wilt, 'A Sociolinguistic Analysis of *na*', *VT* 46 (1996) 248, indicates that this use of נא fits into the category of a speaker desiring something from a hearer when the relationship between them 'would not normally obligate' the hearer to fulfil the speaker's request. Other examples of this context are Gen 24:17; Num 20:17; Judg 11:19; 2 Sam 13:5-6 and 2 Kgs 4:22. See Chapter 2.3.4, fn.101, for the relationship of these interpretations of נא in relation to those given in Hebrew grammars. Shimon Bar-Efrat, S., *Narrative Art in the Bible* (JSOTSS 70; BLS 17; trans. D. Shefer-Vanson; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989) 66-67 also considers the jussive plus נא to be a form of polite language, and is conventional for people of low status to a person of higher status.

<sup>23</sup> Noted correctly in Garsiel, *Samuel*, 126: David 'does not specify either items or quantities, leaving it all to Nabal's discretion.' See also Alter, *David Story*, 154, who notes also the polite wording in the request proper.

<sup>24</sup> See Dennis Pardee, J. David Whitehead, Paul E. Dion, 'An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography', *JBL* 97 (1978) 339, 343 (summarised in Dennis Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters: A Study Edition* [SBLSPS 15; Chico: Scholars, 1982] 145-152). They note that ועת is omitted in *Arad* 4, 12; and in *Lachish* 2, 5 and 6, it is replaced with מי עבדך כלב כי. However, Polzin, *Samuel*, 206, indicates ועתה is used widely in chs 24-26, so it is also part of the narrative technique.

expressed in terms of purpose or result.<sup>25</sup> In effect, David in this part of his message, uses impolite, or direct language.<sup>26</sup> This inclusion of impoliteness in his otherwise respectful speech is likely to be deliberate. David's insistence that Nabal confer with his men and respond favourably anticipates his angry response when Nabal did not do it.

To summarise, David's request to Nabal is polite and respectful. David affirms Nabal's desire for peace and well-being (giving שלום), gives reasons for his request, puts Nabal in the role of social superior, negotiates by using in-group language and by not stating exactly what he expects to receive, and allows Nabal discretion in what to give. The point of this language is to encourage, even manipulate, the hearer to respond favourably to the request, yet be seen to keep face in the process. However, the inherent ambiguity in polite language, which allows Nabal discretion to respond, also hides David's intentions. This is most clearly seen in David's reasons in v.7. Such ambiguity agrees with Alter's argument that direct speech by a character may not reflect that character's emotions and motivations.

#### 6.2.2.2. NABAL'S RESPONSE TO DAVID (25:10-11)

Nabal does not respond favourably to David's request (25:10-11). The way he responds proves his characterisation as קשה ורע מעללים in v.3. He is rude, proved by the rhetorical questions in v.10a (מי דוד ומי בן-ישי), a constant use of the first person in v.11, and the characterisation of David and his men as nobodies (v.11b).<sup>27</sup> He not only rejects David's claim of in-group status (David is 'Jesse's son', not his) and David's men being 'his servants' (they are 'runaway slaves'), but he goes further: David is nobody's son and David's men are nobody's

<sup>25</sup> S.R. Llewelyn, personal communication. The jussive introduces David's request proper. E.A. Cowley, E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §109f (§109.2), understand the jussive in the imperative-jussive sequence to indicate 'an assurance of a contingent occurrence' (i.e. Nabal asking his men and giving favour to David's men co-occur; C.f. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 578: *Ask your young men ... and may ... find favour ...*). But recent grammars understand the jussive to express purpose or result (Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction*, §34.6; J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Syntax* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994] §87a; van der Merve et al, *Reference Grammar*, §21.5.1; Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992] §63.3.2; C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995] 21.8c), a view reflected in the translations of v.8a by McCarter, *I Samuel*, 389 (*Ask your young men ...so look with favour ...*) and the NRSV (*Ask your young men ... Therefore let ... find favour ...*).

<sup>26</sup> Christiansen, 'Linguistic,' 390: שאל represents a 'raw demand', and מצאו represents a 'bald request'. However, since מצאו is in sequence with שאל, it has the force of an imperative and so should be viewed as a 'bald request'.

<sup>27</sup> The excessive use of the first person is noted by Alter, *David Story*, 154 (citing S. Bar-Efrat, *1 and 2 Samuel: With Introduction and Commentary* [in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996]: there are 'eight grammatical expressions of the first person singular' in 25:11); Fokkelman, *Fates*, 488-489; and Baldwin, *Samuel*, 149.

servants. That is, they have no identity, and so are marginal people. They do not deserve to be given anything.

In his rejection of David as in-group and his men as ‘servants’, Nabal’s literalising of David’s deferential בְּנֵי is straightforward to understand: he refuses to consider David as in-group with the obligations that this implies. But the literalising of עַבְדֶּיךָ to make David’s men appear as runaway slaves is interesting. Such literalising indicates that the deferential use of עַבְד in biblical Hebrew is not divorced from its roots in the social institution of slavery. In Ritchie’s terms, the text recognises latent associations in the conventional use of עַבְד for deference, by parodying the ‘slave as inferior’ association of slavery. Thus David’s deferential statement of relative inferiority is turned into literal social inferiority: he and his men are slaves, and runaway ones at that! It also indicates Nabal’s rudeness: he has rejected customary deferential language. Nabal’s literal inferiorising of David is then extended in the comment, אֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אִי מִזֶּה הֵמָּה. This plays on the idea that identity is based on a place of origin.<sup>28</sup> David and his men have no status, not even slave status. They are social nothings.

To summarise, Nabal is portrayed as excessively rude. The rudeness is not shown by his bald language, which is expected for someone in the role of a social superior,<sup>29</sup> but it is done by parodying David’s deferential language to portray him and his men as social nothings and focusing on his property as his own. That is, Nabal is portrayed as going beyond the bounds of reasonableness. Thus he fulfils the narrator’s characterisation of him in v.3.

### 6.2.2.3. THE YOUNG MAN’S SPEECH (25:14-17)

The speech by Nabal’s נָעַר is rather impolite. There is no greeting to Abigail, no deferential language, and the request is made up of two ‘raw demands of imperatives’<sup>30</sup>: דַּעֲי וְרֹאֵי (25:17a). However, the speech is not totally impolite. Extensive reasons are given to support the request (vv.14b-16); and, like David to Nabal, Abigail is given discretion in how she should respond. Politeness theory recognises that a person in an emotional state or dealing with urgent matters

<sup>28</sup> C.f. Prov 27:8, which takes a negative view of people who constantly travel.

<sup>29</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 69. This is indicated in the Arad ostraca, where it can be safely inferred that letters that do not use deferential language were sent by a social superior to the recipient. See Pardee, *Handbook*, 80. van Wolde, ‘Leader,’ 359, also recognises that Nabal ‘talks like a big boss’.

<sup>30</sup> Christiansen, ‘Linguistic,’ 390.

will dispense with customary polite language,<sup>31</sup> which is the case here: the נער has correctly guessed that David will exact revenge for Nabal's snub and is understandably worried. But the extensive reasons the נער gives to support his request is more than simple politeness; it also plays a part in the narrative's plot. David's claim that he has protected Nabal's men and flocks (vv.7-8a) is now proved true. Abigail being given discretion also plays a part in the plot: she will now be shown to be טובת-שכל as characterised in v.3. The speech itself is also ironic because one of Nabal's 'servants' is now shown to be breaking away from his אדון (going to Abigail, denigrating Nabal); that is, doing exactly what Nabal accused David of doing.<sup>32</sup>

#### 6.2.2.4. ABIGAIL'S REQUESTS TO DAVID (25:23-31)

Abigail's speech to David, as noted already, is deferential. It is also universally noted as tactful and rhetorically effective.<sup>33</sup> Abigail 'takes' on herself the blame for Nabal's snub of David, she is deferential, she gives food, and she looks to the future to when David will be נגיד over Israel. Scholarship is right to emphasise how the topics Abigail brings up (bloodshed, future rulership, David's enemies, YHWH's overruling of events) assist her argument, but how Abigail speaks also forms part of her tact and rhetoric.

Abigail's request opens with the narrator giving a three-fold statement of obeisance (ותפל לאפי) (דוד על-פניה ותשתחו ארץ ותפל על-רגליו; 25:23b-24a). This act immediately places her in the role of inferior to David<sup>34</sup> and widens the social distance between them, which is the same effect as her frequent master-slave deference (אדני and שפחה, אמתך). Despite possible allusions to

<sup>31</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 69. Two other examples of speakers not using expected polite language due to emotion are 2 Sam 3:24-25 and 2 Kgs 4:28.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 582; Bodner, *1 Samuel*, 264; Levenson, '1 Samuel 25,' 16; van Wolde, 'Leader,' 360, but on the basis of the narrator's description of the speaker: נער-אחד מהנערים ('one young man of the young men'); that is, instead of narrating *one of Nabal's young men* ....

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 152; Brueggemann, *Samuel*, 178; Tsumura, *Samuel*, 587 ('wise words'); Baldwin, *Samuel*, 150 (Abigail's obsequiousness has 'increasing impact as she continues'); Gunn, *Fate*, 99 ('a model of tact'); Levenson, '1 Samuel 25,' 19 ('a masterpiece' of rhetoric); Moshe Garsiel, 'Wit, Words, and a Woman: 1 Samuel 25', in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSS 92; BLS 23; eds, Y.T. Radday, A. Brenner; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990) 167 ('a master of rhetoric'); Kessler, 'Sexuality,' 413 (the speech reflects wisdom motifs on the restraint of anger); Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 151 (Abigail is 'tactful and persuasive', and 'prudent in speech'); H.W. Hertzberg, *1 & II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964) 203 ('shows propriety and skill'); Robert P. Gordon, *1 & II Samuel: A Commentary* (LBI; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 183 ('tact and charm').

<sup>34</sup> Recognised by, e.g. Alter, *David Story*, 156; Edelman, *King Saul*, 214; Green, 'Enacting,' 15; Gunn, *Fate*, 100; Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 74; Berlin, 'Characterization,' 77.

Jacob doing obeisance to Esau in Gen 33:3,<sup>35</sup> obeisance is a feature of people presenting legal petitions in 1 and 2 Samuel (e.g. 2 Sam 14:4; 15:5) and is also a feature in formal requests in Genesis (23:7, 12; 42:6; 43:26; 44:14). That is, Abigail adheres to a conventional expression of politeness in connection with requests. However, the three-fold statement of obeisance suits the plot: Abigail is in a desperate situation.

The desperate nature of the situation is also shown in the opening of Abigail's speech. She opens her speech with בִּיאֲנִי אֲדֹנָי הָעֹן (*upon me, my lord, be the guilt*; 25:24), in which אֲנִי serves to emphasise בִּי, 'upon me'. Emphasis on herself occurs again in v.25 with אֲנִי placed in apposition to אֲמַתְךָ when she claims not to have seen David's messengers. In similar fashion to David in v.8a, a jussive (וּתְדַבֵּר־נָא) and imperative (וּשְׁמַע) appear in Abigail's parallel statements that she be allowed to speak (v.24). The sequence suggests וּשְׁמַע expresses intention or expectation for וּתְדַבֵּר־נָא (she wants to be listened to), and gives force or vigour to her request to be heard.<sup>36</sup> Thus, in contrast to David in v.8a, Abigail is more polite, since the jussive וּתְדַבֵּר coupled with נָא represents conventional politeness.<sup>37</sup> The jussive with נָא also appears in her request that David not take Nabal's snub to heart (אֲלֵ-נָא יִשִּׁים אֲדֹנָי אֶת־לִבּוֹ; v.25a). In effect, Abigail opens with strong but respectful language. The strength of her opening words is consistent with her triple obeisance to highlight her desperation, but her respectful language already proves the narrator's description of her as טוֹבַת־שָׂכָל in v.3.

The use of בִּיאֲנִי highlights her 'blame taking', הָעֹן. This should be read as an apology for her speech,<sup>38</sup> not as taking on Nabal's guilt,<sup>39</sup> since in v.25 she places the blame on him by name-calling him. 'Blame taking' is repeated in v.28, which also introduces the second half of her speech. In effect, Abigail uses a politeness strategy, 'apologise', which indicates a desire not to impinge upon David.<sup>40</sup> The same strategy of apologising by 'taking blame' occurs in 2 Sam 14:9 (see Section 6.3.2.2 below). The name-calling of her husband along with אֲלֵ-נָא יִשִּׁים אֲדֹנָי

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Miscall, *1 Samuel*, 157-158; Alter, *David Story*, 157; Biddle, 'Ancestral,' 631; Levenson, '1 Samuel 25,' 18

<sup>36</sup> Cowley and Kautsch, *Hebrew Grammar*, §135g (§135.2), §110i; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction* §16.3.4; Gibson, *Hebrew Grammar* §1d, §86b. The assonance that occurs with the *yod* ending of the first three words would be aurally effective when spoken.

<sup>37</sup> Christiansen, 'Linguistic,' 392. C.f. Gen 44:18 and 2 Sam 14:1 for jussive plus נָא also in the context of requests for being allowed to speak.

<sup>38</sup> So McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 398; Alter, *David Story*, 157 (for v.28); and canvassed in Klein, *1 Samuel*, 250. C.f. Fokkelman, *Fates*, 498-499, who argues Abigail's 'blame taking' shows that her speech is an entreaty.

<sup>39</sup> So Tsumura, *Samuel*, 588; Baldwin, *Samuel*, 150; Green, 'Enacting,' 16; Levenson, '1 Samuel 25,' 19.

<sup>40</sup> Other examples of 'apologise' occur in Gen 18:27, 30, 32; 44:18; and 2 Sam 19:19.

את־לבו, which fits the politeness strategy ‘give reasons,’ also reflects another strategy, ‘minimise the imposition’.<sup>41</sup> Here, Abigail seeks to minimise offence already caused. That is, Nabal’s snub of David is of no importance. Her point is rhetorically significant because it is the basis of her argument that if David kills Nabal and his men in revenge, he will incur bloodguilt (vv.26, 31). That is, by using this strategy of politeness, she argues that David’s threatened punishment does not fit Nabal’s crime because Nabal is only a stupid man.

Abigail’s use of אֲדֹנָי, שִׁפְחוֹתָךְ and אֲמַתְךָ, which puts her in the role of inferior to David, is considerable. This alone makes her speech respectful towards David, no matter the validity of politeness analysis. However, her language is no more obsequious than many other speeches or prayers in the Bible (e.g. 2 Sam 14; Neh 1:5-11; Ps 86), and is eclipsed by that in Gen 44:18-34; 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 7:18-29; Lachish 2, 5, and the Mešad Ḥashavyahu plea. That is, Abigail adheres to conventional polite deference, as she did with her obeisance. Master-servant deference also has the effect of bringing in another politeness strategy: the use of the third person for both speaker and hearer instead of direct address. That is, deference distances the relationship between Abigail and David, as well as indicates relative status (see Chapter 2.3.1, Table 2).

Interestingly, the purpose of Abigail’s speech, namely, that David refrain from vengeance, is not stated directly. It is implied in vv.25 and 31. This is effectively an ‘off record’ request and is more polite than all other politeness strategies. Such a strategy gives David complete freedom in both interpreting the point of the speech and responding as he sees fit.<sup>42</sup> The drawback is similar to what has been noted for David’s request to Nabal, but more so: David may misinterpret the intention of her speech and therefore not give the desired response. However, Abigail’s speech is also part of the plot of 1 Samuel 25: she is set up to be the hero of the story and the master of the situation,<sup>43</sup> despite her obeisance and obsequiousness. Her ‘predictive’ statement (מִנְעַךְ יְהוָה מִבּוֹא בְדָמִים וְהוֹשַׁע יָדְךָ לִי) in 25:26 with its perfect verb (מִנְעַךְ) is extensively discussed and, assuming it is original to the story, puts Abigail in the role of someone with divine-like knowledge, paralleling Saul in 20:31 and 24:20 and Jonathan in

<sup>41</sup> This strategy is used in Num 20:19 (see Chapter 5.3); Gen 19:20; and 2 Sam 7:19.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>43</sup> Biddle, ‘Ancestral,’ 634 (‘hero’), 627; Green, ‘Enacting,’ 15; Baldwin, *Samuel*, 151. C.f. the wise woman in 2 Sam 14, whose fictitious plea also forces a response from David.

23:17.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in her final statement, והיטב יהוה לאדני וזכרת את־אמתך (25:31) the two perfect verbs should also be thought to be predictive; the first (היטב) is best considered to be coordinated adversatively with the imperfect תהיה at the beginning of the verse, and the second (זכרת) sequential to the preceding היטב, i.e. *My lord shall have no ..., but the LORD will deal well with my lord and you will remember your servant.*<sup>45</sup> In other words, God will favour David who will in turn favour Abigail. Thus Abigail expresses a desire and expectation that David marry her. In effect, Abigail uses the politeness strategy, “be conventionally indirect,” similar to David’s in v.8. The expectation can be counter-read in similar fashion as for David in 1-2 Samuel as a whole to suggest that Abigail’s speech contains the ulterior motive of a request for marriage.<sup>46</sup> Jobling and Alter go as far to suggest that Abigail will resort to murder to have David.<sup>47</sup>

But there is another feature of Abigail’s speech that plays a part in her character role. Master-slave deference decreases in those parts of her speech in which she predicts YHWH’s intervention and David as incurring bloodguilt if he continues with his plan to annihilate Nabal and his men (25:26, 29-30). It is entirely absent in v.26 except for the transition from blaming Nabal to prediction (ועתה אדני). In vv.29-30, אדני appears once only in each verse in contrast to multiple times in vv.27-29 and 31. As is also shown in Section 6.3 and Chapter 7, reduction in master-slave deference tends to occur when characters give reasons. Abigail’s predictions are essentially reasons why David should not exact revenge on Nabal. However, because her ‘reasons’ are divine-like predictions, her change in language shows her dominance in the narrative: when she speaks as if on behalf of YHWH, she takes the role of superior; when she requests, she takes the role of inferior. Thus the narrator presents her as subordinate to David in her plea for restraint yet superordinate to David in the matter of how his actions will affect his future as king.

<sup>44</sup> Despite this extensive discussion, only Edelman, *King Saul*, 218, and van Wolde, ‘Leader,’ 362, link the perfect directly with prediction. Tsumura, *Samuel*, 588-589, interprets the perfect as Abigail using a rhetorical ploy: by assuming God has restrained David from violence, it will be hard for him to continue with his vengeance against Nabal. Those who imply the past tense force of the perfect in their translations of מנעך are Alter, *David Story*, 157; Green, ‘Enacting,’ 16, and McCarter, *I Samuel*, 394.

<sup>45</sup> S.R. Llewelyn, personal communication.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. Bodner, *I Samuel*, 266-267; Miscall, *I Samuel*, 152; Alter, *David Story*, 31; Jobling, *I Samuel*, 155-158; Edelman, *King Saul*, 214; Nichol, ‘David,’ 136; Biddle, ‘Ancestral,’ 627; Levenson, ‘1 Samuel 25,’ 18-19. Contrast E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 296, who argues, using aspects of politeness theory, that Abigail has no choice but to marry David and so has to accept it.

<sup>47</sup> Alter *David Story*, 31; and Jobling, *I Samuel*, 155-158.

To summarise, Abigail is presented as a complex character. In keeping with her characterisation in v.3 as טוֹבַת־שָׂכָל, she is presented not only as respectful to David but also ‘wise’ as to David’s future. But her politeness presents ambiguity in both what she says and how that affects her characterisation. Her main request, that David refrain from vengeance is indicated as important and the key issue because it is ‘off-record’ (that is, implied, and highly polite<sup>48</sup>), which allows David the freedom to interpret the message and respond as he sees fit. However, because it is ‘off-record,’ it has the effect that her secondary request, that David marry her, becomes prominent. Her deference in those parts of her speech that deal with her request/s places her in the role of an inferior, but the reduced deference in her ‘predictions’ puts her in the role of superior. Ultimately, as the narrative proceeds, it all works: David refrains from vengeance and recognises YHWH has spoken through Abigail (vv.32-33, 39). As shown for David’s request, polite language is used to encourage the hearer to respond, yet be seen to maintain his face in the process.

#### 6.2.2.5. DAVID’S REPLY TO ABIGAIL (25:32-35) AND SOLILOQUY (25:39)

David’s response to Abigail’s speech (vv.32-35) and his speech to no one in particular after Nabal’s death (v.39) show that he is the social superior to Abigail, despite the latter speech reflecting human inferiority to YHWH with its use of עֲבֹדָךְ in deference to YHWH. He is the one with power: he gives ‘blessing’ to Abigail; shows he has power over life and death by stating his threat of v.22 to her; and he answers her as a social superior to a suppliant.<sup>49</sup> There is no use of deferential language. Direct speech is kept (i.e. the use of first and second person). He does not thank her as such. If he did, he would put himself in debt to her, or at least humble his own face (that is, there is some loss of face).<sup>50</sup> Instead, he ‘blesses’ YHWH and her, which takes the place of expressing thanks. That is, piety is used to maintain face. Thus Abigail was correct to be polite to him. Even though David has played the inferior role to Nabal in his requests (reflecting conventional politeness), his desire for revenge puts him in

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>49</sup> Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 74, notes that a character answering a request is a mark of a social superior in an interaction in biblical narrative.

<sup>50</sup> Brown and Levinson, 67. Good examples of thanks as a debt are found in 2 Kgs 5:15-17 (Naaman desires to give Elisha a present, and upon refusal, promises to worship YHWH) and Ps 116 (thanks to YHWH is expressed as cultic obligation [vv.13-14, 17-19]; but self-abasement also appears in v.16). Direct thanks is occasionally found in biblical narrative: see 2 Sam 14:22 and 16:4, and Ruth 2:13; but frequently in Psalms. See discussion in Section 6.2.2.6, 6.3.6, and Chapter 9.2.2.2.



the role of superior (he will give a show of power). Abigail's speech has allowed him to remain in that role, despite her prophet-like predictions of his future. In his response to her, David keeps that role.

#### 6.2.2.6. ABIGAIL'S RESPONSE TO DAVID'S MARRIAGE PROPOSAL (25:41-42)

Abigail's response to David's marriage proposal is an excellent example of obsequious rhetoric. In her statement, הנה אמתך לשפחה לרחץ רגלי עבדי אדני (*See! Your servant is a slave-girl to wash my lord's servants' feet*; v.41), she places herself in a highly inferior status relative to David and his men. But it cannot be meant literally. In v.42 she is riding on a donkey and has five נערות who ההלכות לרגלה (*walk at her feet*), which portrays her as a woman of status.

Why the excessively obsequious language? Edelman understands it as Abigail desiring to become a mistress or concubine to David.<sup>51</sup> Against this interpretation is that she remains portrayed as a woman of status, and, as indicated in Chapter 4.2.9, other women in the Hebrew Bible use master-slave deference. Lipiński recognises Abigail's status and argues, using the Royal Steward of Silwen, the Shelimoth and Ammonite אמה seal inscriptions and other inscriptions in Semitic languages with אמה in connection with apparent wife-status, that Abigail outright intends 'Here is your wife (acting) as a house-maid to wash the feet of my spouse's officers'.<sup>52</sup> Against this interpretation is Abigail's use of אמתך in vv.24-31, in which Lipiński himself would recognise as being conventional deferential language. Why suddenly change interpretation in v.41? Clearly, Abigail's use of שפחה can be debated (Lipiński recognises self-abasement here; see below), but אמתך should be understood as Abigail continuing her usual deferential language. Klein understands the language to be that of hospitality, since 'your servant' and 'wash feet' is included in the language of hospitality elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 18:4, 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judg 19:21; see Chapter 7). Intertextuality considerations with Genesis indicate Klein's interpretation has merit, but another suggestion can be made.

<sup>51</sup> See Section 6.2.1 and fn.10. Edelman's interpretation works because of the phenomenon of slave women becoming wives to their master or others in their master's household (see Chapter 3.2.2), but the use of master-slave deference by women in 1 Sam 1:11 and 2 Sam 14 should have cautioned her against such an interpretation.

<sup>52</sup> Lipiński, 'Kinship Terminology,' 14-16.

There is a tendency for people in biblical texts to abase themselves when someone has favourably treated them. Examples are Ruth 2:10, 13; 2 Sam 7:18; 9:8; 1 Kgs 3:7; 2 Kgs 8:13; and Lachish 2, 5, 6.<sup>53</sup> This can be explained by face saving in thanks, as discussed above for David's refusal to thank Abigail directly for her intervention, and for the Lachish letters: giving thanks means indebteding one's self to the hearer, or at least humbling one's face. Self-abasement does the latter. In metaphor theory terminology, self-abasement that uses figurative language presents a 'counterfactual scenario' to the topic, which plays on the secondary associations upon which the language draws.<sup>54</sup> In Abigail's situation, the secondary association of slavery, 'inferior status', goes beyond conventional politeness to contrast her role in her response as inferior to David (שפחה) with her real status (a wealthy woman). By using self-abasement, Abigail reduces her face relative to David and so avoids indebtedness to him, but at the same time increases David's face by showing how gracious he was to treat her favourably. As a result, it has the effect of increasing social distance between speaker and hearer. Thus Abigail's self-abasement should be read as thanks for the offer of marriage. Her thanks also highlights David's role as social superior to her in the story.<sup>55</sup> she gives thanks to him, whereas he has not given thanks to her. Such a reading also adds to the discussion above that Abigail requested David marry her: her self abasement as thanks indicates she has got what she requested.

The contrast of Abigail's servile language of thanks with the narrator's portrayal of her with five נערות ההלכות לרגלה (v.42) prompts the view, noted earlier, that she is portrayed as queen-like.<sup>56</sup> This, however, should be mitigated with the observation that Abigail herself has also described David's men as 'servants' walking at David's feet (v.27: נערים המתהלכים ברגלי אדני). Biddle uses this to describe David also as king-like, along with the observation of the change

<sup>53</sup> See Appendix 1.2. See also, for a general discussion on self-abasement formulae, George W. Coats, 'Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas', *JBL* 89 (1972) 14-26.

<sup>54</sup> L. David Ritchie, *Context and Connection in Metaphor* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 159.

<sup>55</sup> Raymond Westbrook, 'The Female Slave', in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSS 262; eds, V.H. Matthews, B.M. Levinson, T. Frymer-Kensky; London: T&T Clark, 1998) 230 and fn.41, also argues that Abigail's language is customary polite self-abasement. Westbrook also argues that the widespread use of master-slave deference also applied to the husband-wife relationship. In support of his argument, he draws attention to ancient Near Eastern texts (seals, tomb inscriptions, tablets) in which 'slave' is used in a marriage setting. No doubt Westbrook has in mind the Royal Steward and Ammonite seals referred to in Chapter 1.1, fn.20 and texts given in Appendix 1.1, fn.50, and used in Lipiński, 'Kinship,' 12-16.

<sup>56</sup> See fn.10 above: Bodner, Biddle and Klein. Baldwin, *Samuel*, 152, however interprets the נערות as being a conventional part of Eastern weddings.

of language for his men from נערים to עבדים (v.40).<sup>57</sup> But such language does not necessarily require the interpretation that the narrator now portrays both David and Abigail as regal figures. Schäfer-Lichtenberger's study on the terms used to denote people in Saul and David's respective administrations lends partial support to Biddle's view, in that both עבדים and נערים, along with אנשים, appear as official designations for people in service to David. But she also comments that prior to David's administration in Jerusalem the three terms were simply used to denote David's followers.<sup>58</sup> This is how the three terms (איש appears in vv.13, 20) should be understood in 1 Sam 25. A comparison with Genesis and the wider Samuel narratives also shows that non-royal persons can have עבדים; for example, 2 Sam 9:12 (Mephibosheth); 14:30-31 (Joab); Gen 26:15, 19, 25, 32 (Abraham); 32:17 [16] (Jacob). See also Judg 6:27 (Gideon's father). That is, it is a common biblical convention to use עבד to denote a person's servants, slave or otherwise. Likewise, נערים is used for fighting men in Gen 14:24; 1 Sam 21:3-6 [2-5]; and 30:17, without their leaders being royal figures. These uses of עבדים seem to be missed by those who argue that 1 Sam 25 portrays David and Abigail as regal figures.

To summarise, Abigail's self-abasement is polite rhetoric and a counterfactual use of figurative language that indicates thanks for a request (for marriage; see v.31) that has been answered favourably. The rhetoric, which goes beyond conventional deference, plays on the association of slavery, 'inferior status', using the image of a maidservant who provides personal service to another (a typical use for שפחה<sup>59</sup>) as a metaphor. The juxtaposition of this self-abasement with her as a woman of status with נערות who attend her, along with David's men portrayed as עבדים and מלאכים (v.42), is almost comical: the low-status 'slave' is a woman of status and a 'master'. Abigail is extremely polite, but has got what she wanted. One can imagine her smiling as she rides after David.

### 6.2.3. Conclusions

Respectful, or polite, language of David and Abigail puts each speaker in the inferior role to his/her hearer. The purpose of such language is to encourage a favourable response from each

<sup>57</sup> Biddle, 'Ancestral,' 622-623.

<sup>58</sup> C. Schäfer-Lichtenberger, 'Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State', in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (eds, V. Fritz, P.R. Davies; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996) 100-101. Levenson, '1 Samuel 25,' 16, also notes that the use of עבדים and נערים for David's men suggests he is portrayed as a leader. He then goes on to say that Abigail's five נערות also indicates she is similar to David—also a leader (p.18).

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix 1.1 for discussion on the terms שפחה and אמה.

hearer. The result is a certain ambiguity in the speakers' communications. In the interests of addressing any potential loss to the hearer's face, they use language that can be described as manipulative, and do not state their own motivations for speaking. The result is that they direct the communication. This is shown most clearly by Abigail, whose use of master-slave deference (typical in the Bible), apology for her husband, keeping her main request as 'off-record' (that is, not stated directly), her 'predictions' about David—and her 'remember your servant'—result in a favourable response from David. The wealthy woman, whose social status suggests she does not need to be respectful to outlawed David takes the inferior role ('slave'), and wins—she is master of the situation.

David's attempt to do similarly (message form, familial and obsequious deference, polite grammar, giving Nabal discretion) meets in failure. As the narrator takes pains to point out, it is not due to David's role in the story: he has accepted the role of outlaw and therefore social inferior to Nabal despite his king-in-waiting-status in the wider narrative. Rather, the failure is due to Nabal's rudeness, indicated to be a literalising and therefore a parody of David's conventional politeness. That is, Nabal is portrayed as someone who rejects common convention for his own selfish purposes, highlighted in v.36 with his king-like feast. David's response to Abigail, however, puts him back into the role of king-in-waiting and social superior.<sup>60</sup> He uses the language of blessing, grants Abigail's 'off-record' request that Nabal be spared, gives peace to her, and eventually takes up her secondary request to marry her.

In relation to master-slave deference, 1 Samuel 25 shows clearly that slavery terms when used in deference in the Hebrew Bible have not lost their associations with slavery, even though they form part of conventional politeness to a social superior. The key association evoked is 'inferior status.' But as just been concluded, the deferential language does not imply servility on the part of David to Nabal nor Abigail to David. This will also be shown to be the case for the wise woman in 2 Sam 14 (see Section 6.3). Rather, the impression of servility is used to encourage the hearers to respond favourably to requests.

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<sup>60</sup> van Wolde, 'Leader,' 374, goes as far to say that 'David is led by Abigail to develop his identity as *nāgîd* of Israel', but the narrative has already affirmed that David will be king (1 Sam 16; 23:17, 24:20—said by Saul), though מלך is used rather than נגד.

In relation to previous scholarship on 1 Samuel 25, my analysis gives a caution that the language of David and Abigail reflects customary polite speech in the context of requests. This needs to be factored in before other interpretative approaches are applied. For example, obeisance and obsequiousness should be first viewed as customary politeness before being discussed as parallels with, for example, Jacob and Esau, anachronistically portraying David as king and Abigail as queen, or as connoting sexual desire on the part of Abigail.<sup>61</sup> However, the inherent ambiguity in polite language allows for investigation of motives, and hence permits a counter-reading of the text. Even Brown and Levinson recognise that politeness can be used for more than saving face: for example, ‘off-record’ strategies can be used for poetic effect and play on language, as well as evasiveness and vagueness.<sup>62</sup> Given that 1 Samuel 25 is a literary creation, it should be expected that the narrator uses the characters’ ambiguous language, even if conventional, as integral to the storytelling. There may also be deliberate double entendre at a number of points in the narrative, something that is worth investigating in depth.

Within the text of 1 Samuel 25, ambiguity as part of the plot is evident. David’s reason for arming his men to destroy Nabal and his men (v.13) is dragged out: first is the command for them to get their swords, then Nabal’s נָעַר infers there is danger to Nabal’s household, and finally David says so in his self-talk of vv.21-22. Yet even in his self-talk, his motive for his murderous intentions has ambiguity. He makes the formulaic statement, וישב־לי רעה תחת טובה (‘he returned to me evil for good’) which can imply that Nabal did more to him than just snub him. Abigail’s speech exploits this. The narrator also makes no authorial comment on the situation. This aspect of the plot of 1 Samuel 25 suits the portrayal of David in the wider narratives. Unlike for Abigail and Nabal in v.3, David is never given a definitive description by the narrator as ‘good’, ‘wise’, ‘bad’, and so on. All comments about David being after YHWH’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14), ‘better than’ Saul (15:28), and YHWH looking ‘at the heart’ (16:7), are placed in the speech of various characters, even if that character is YHWH (as in 16:7). Thus David has the potential to be evil in the Samuel narrative, proved in 1

<sup>61</sup> To be fair on Edelman, she first acknowledges Abigail’s conventional deference (*King Saul*, 214). However, this interpretation is based on an understanding of the female slave terms, אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה, as being sexually suggestive. This interpretation of the terms is critiqued in Appendix 1.1. See also fn.51 above.

<sup>62</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 93.

Samuel 25 by having to be restrained—by a woman who is described as טובת-שכל and who ‘masters’ him.<sup>63</sup>

### **6.3. DEFERENTIAL LANGUAGE IN 2 SAMUEL 14: THE TEKOITE WOMAN**

#### **6.3.1. Introduction**

In contrast to 1 Samuel 25, the interaction between the wise woman of Tekoa and David in 2 Samuel 14 uses the inherent ambiguity of deferential and other polite language as an integral part of the plot. The chapter starts with a deliberately hidden motive. At the beginning of the interaction, the woman constructs a deliberately false persona to get David to give a legal ruling she wants him to give. She then has to apply that ruling to him, without dropping her false persona. But once found out, she then has to redress her deception. In effect, she plays three roles: plaintiff wanting justice, judge of her king, and loyal subject—in the difficult context of manipulating her king to make a certain decision about one of his sons, a decision that his army commander, Joab, apparently wants him to make. In effect, deference and other polite language are used to manipulate.

The setting of the story, being different from 1 Samuel 25, brings awareness of matters that may affect the characters’ language. One is that the woman is a subject of David. It would be expected that her language would reflect what is appropriate for a subject speaking to her king. A comparison of her language with 2 Sam 9 (Mephibosheth and Ziba to David) and 19 (Barzillai, Ziba and Mephibosheth to David) shows, for example, that master-slave deferential language is conventional in this setting. Second, the setting is that of a legal plea. Comparisons with other legal pleas (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:16-22; 20:39-40; Mešad Ḥashavyahu) indicate that master-slave deferential language is also conventional in this setting. Third, 2 Samuel 14 is intimately connected with a wider narrative (2 Sam 13-20) that deals with David’s family woes that are said to arise as YHWH’S punishment for David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11-12). Therefore, it is expected that the characters are portrayed with the wider story in mind.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Alter keeps true to his method in his view that David is portrayed as an ambivalent character (*David Story*, xvii-xix). C.f. Yairah Amit, “‘The Glory of Israel does not Deceive or Change His Mind’: On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative”, *Prooftexts* 12 (1992) 205-206, who notes that David is consistently portrayed as a ‘sophisticated politician’ who sought people’s favour, but can also violate ethical norms.

<sup>64</sup> William H. Propp, ‘Kinship in 2 Samuel 13’, *CBQ* 55 (1993) 53.

In the wider story of which 2 Sam 14 is a part, David's eldest son Amnon (3:2), has raped Tamar, Absalom's full sister, but was not punished by David (13:1-22). Absalom murdered Amnon in revenge and has exiled himself to Geshur (13:13-38). An apparent change of heart in David (13:39) is the reason for the present text (14:1): Joab employs the wise woman to get David to recall Absalom from exile. But once Absalom arrives (14:23), David refuses to allow him to come to court (14:24). The chapter closes with Absalom forcing Joab to take his case to the king and so finally he is 'reconciled' with his father (14:28-33). But the reconciliation appears incomplete: the narrative moves immediately to Absalom's patient preparations for his rebellion (15:1-6).

The narrative of 14:1-23 is built around a fictitious legal case of two sons of a widow, one of whom has murdered the other (vv.4-11). The ruling wanted is that the murderer be allowed to live in order to perpetuate his father's name. The issue that the woman presents is a clash of two legal principles: perpetuating a family name and inheritance versus blood-revenge for murder.<sup>65</sup> Once the ruling is given, it is then used to argue that David commits injustice by not recalling Absalom from his self-imposed exile (v.13). Theological arguments form part of the argument: by not recalling Absalom, the king causes the people of Israel to suffer (v.14a) and is in contravention of God's actions (v.14b). As the narrative proceeds, David's refusal to restore Absalom to court (vv.24, 28) fulfils the truth of the woman's statements: it becomes part of the development of Absalom's rebellion, which *does* cause suffering to the people.

### 6.3.2. Analysis

#### 6.3.2.1. MOTIVATION AND AMBIGUITY (14:1)

The reason for the narrative of chapter 14 is clear: ותכל דוד המלך לצאת אל-אבשלום כי-נחם על-אמנון ('and [the heart]<sup>66</sup> of David the king yearned to go out to Absalom for he was comforted over [the death of] Amnon'; 13:39) and Joab responds to it: וידע יואב בן-צריה כי-לב המלך על-אבשלום ('now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the heart of the king [was] upon Absalom'; 14:1).

<sup>65</sup> The latter is usually thought to reflect clan or customary law. See, e.g. Elizabeth Bellefontaine, 'Customary Law and Chieftainship: Judicial Aspects of 2 Samuel 14:4-21', *JSOT* 12 (1987) 47-72; and Propp, 'Kinship,' 38-53. See also Theodore J. Lewis, 'The Ancestral Estate in 2 Samuel 14:16', *JBL* 110 (1991) 597-612, who also argues that inheritance laws also are customary laws.

<sup>66</sup> 'Heart' is supplied because ותכל is a third-person feminine verb, and לב appears in 14:1. The LXX and Qumran manuscripts supply 'heart' but omit 'David'.

Joab's response to David's feelings is a clear statement by the narrator of motivation, the most reliable clue to characterisation.<sup>67</sup> That is, Joab sees David's thought concerning Absalom, and so takes measures to bring father and son together.

However, there is a problem with the narrator's statement. The key terms used (תכל . . . לצאת [13:39] and על [14:1]) are ambiguous in meaning. They can be interpreted as David being against Absalom but the desire to deal with him has waned, or as David longing to have Absalom home but cannot because of the need to bring him to justice. The matter is extensively discussed.<sup>68</sup> The problem is that David's feelings about Absalom at this point in the narrative have to be reconciled with his refusal to be reconciled with him once he is recalled. The former interpretation is preferred because of the woman's accusation that David is sinning by keeping Absalom in exile and because of David's refusal to see Absalom in vv.24 and 28. But this interpretation suffers the problem that explanations are needed as to why Joab works against his lord's immediate wishes, even though his doing so is in line with 1-2 Samuel's portrayal of him in conflict with his king. The other conflicts ultimately benefit David,<sup>69</sup> but this one brings disaster. The latter interpretation fits with the woman's statement in v.14b about God's actions (therefore the death penalty can be removed), but makes David's refusal to see Absalom surprising. Further support is that Joab's motivation for bringing the wise woman to David is simpler to explain (he follows the wishes of his king in this instance) and David's change of heart once Absalom returns, though inexplicable, can be understood as a factor in Absalom's grievance about justice in 15:3-4.

Consequently, the narrative of 2 Sam 14 opens with ambiguity. The narrator's statements about David's feelings are ambiguous, which also means Joab's motives are ambiguous.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Alter, 'Character,' 59. See Chapter 2.4.1.

<sup>68</sup> For the former, see Alter, *David Story*, 274; P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984) 344; Baldwin, *Samuel*, 252-253; Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (LBI; Grand Rapids, Carlisle: Zondervan, Paternoster, 1986) 265-266; J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume 1: King David* (SSN; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981) 126-127; and Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC 7; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996). For the latter, see John Mauchlin, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971) 264; Peter C. Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel* (CBC; London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 130.

<sup>69</sup> See the literature cited in Section 6.2, fn.8.

<sup>70</sup> Larry L. Lyke, *King David with the Wise Woman of Tekoa: The Resonance of Tradition in Parabolic Narrative* (JSOTSS 255; Sheffield: Sheffield Almond Press, 1997) 186, uses this ambiguity to claim that the woman gives David multiple messages with her fictitious plea. However, it is clear that her plea is designed for one purpose: to have Absalom recalled from exile, no matter what Joab's motives are for wanting this outcome. James W. Flanagan, 'Court History or Succession Document? A Study of 2 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kgs 1-2', *JBL* 91



What is clear is that Joab does not want Absalom to remain in exile, even though it is difficult to know *why* he wants this. Particularly unusual is the effort Joab makes to manipulate David to agreeing to Absalom's recall, when Joab is portrayed at other times as criticising or advising him openly, using direct ('bald') speech (3:24-25; 12:27-28; 19:5-7). As has been noted for David in Section 6.2.3, Joab is also a character who has no definitive descriptions made of him by the narrator. Like David's relationship with Absalom, Joab's relationship with Absalom is ambiguous: he makes the effort to have him recalled, but once this is done, he wants to have nothing to do with him. This ambiguity in feelings and motives by both David and Joab is also part of the plot of the wider narrative. Absalom's rebellion is an attempt to resolve his ambiguous relationship with his father and his standing in Israel, as well as exploiting that ambiguity for his own benefit (15:1-6).

#### 6.3.2.2. THE WOMAN'S FICTITIOUS PLEA (14:4-11)

The wise woman from Tekoa is introduced as a polite subject who petitions the king on a legal matter. Her first action is non-verbal, obeisance to the king (ותפל על-אפיה ארצה ותשתחו) ['and she fell on her face to the ground and prostrated (herself)']; v.4). In similar fashion for Abigail to David in 1 Sam 25:23-24, this act shows her inferior status to David, as well as the wide social distance between them along with his power over her as ruler.<sup>71</sup> Other biblical texts suggest that obeisance is a conventional action when bringing requests to a king (see, e.g. 2 Sam 19:19b [18b] [Shimei; apologising for past behaviour]; 1 Kgs 1:16, 22 [Bathsheba and Nathan]; c.f. Esth 8:3). Where it is omitted (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:16; 2 Kgs 6:26), it can be assumed that it was performed.<sup>72</sup>

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(1972) 179, suggests that Joab is simply meddling in David's affairs, with the result that Absalom can organise his coup.

<sup>71</sup> Prostration is a combination of both 'give deference' and 'notice, attend to' the hearer (see Chapter 2.3.1, Tables 1, 2). Recognising a ruler's power is a form of attending to the interests of the ruler. See Jon Hall, *Politeness and Politics in Cicero's Letters* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), who argues that conventional deference can frequently take the role of positive politeness, since it is focused on the hearer.

<sup>72</sup> Bergen, *Samuel*, 389, recognises that 'the woman appeared with the appropriate humility'. Ackroyd, *Samuel*, 131, recognises that the texts do not permit knowledge of 'the precise customs involved,' but I argue that obeisance is likely to be one of those customs (c.f. 2 Sam 9:6, Mephibosheth's first appearance in the presence of David). Ancient Near Eastern letters (Amarna, Ugarit, some Hittite) indicate that obeisance to social superiors, especially to the king or an overlord, was customary. See texts in William L. Moran (ed., trans.), *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); F. Brent Knutson, 'Literary genres in PRU IV', in *Ras Shamra Parallels* (AnOr 50; 2 vols; ed., L.R. Fisher; Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975, vol. 2) 153-214; Harry A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (SBLWAW 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); Robert Hawley, *Studies in Ugaritic Epistolography* (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago; Ann Arbor: Proquest [University Microfilms], 2003). Requests by biblical characters in other contexts is

The woman's opening words are הוֹשַׁעַה הַמֶּלֶךְ, a request in the imperative. This, at first sight seems impolite. However, it may not be so. Shulman notes that when a social inferior to the hearer uses an imperative without נָא, it is in contexts in which 'they are angry or desperate and do not wish to express politeness.'<sup>73</sup> Shulman's understanding is in accord with politeness theory,<sup>74</sup> but impoliteness before a king would seem strange, especially since the woman includes master-slave deference later in her plaint and has already done obeisance. The same imperative also occurs in 2 Kgs 6:26, which suggests that it could be a conventional opening for a legal plaint. However, no such opening is recorded for plaintiffs in 1 Kgs 3:17 and 20:39. Like for obeisance, the texts do not permit knowledge of 'the precise customs involved,'<sup>75</sup> but to open a legal plaint with the imperative הוֹשַׁעַה should be seen as conventional, and therefore not impolite. As was discussed in Chapter 5.3, this idea has some backing from ancient Hebrew letters such as Arad 18 and Lachish 3 and 9, in which imperatives are used by the senders to their superior recipients. Psalms also contain many requests to God in the imperative. This suggests that, in certain contexts, imperatives by a junior to a senior are not necessarily impolite.<sup>76</sup>

David responds with a blunt מֶה־לֶּךְ (v.5a) which suits his superior status as the woman's king. In presenting her fictitious case, the woman opens with direct (first-person) language as she describes her status as a widow (v.5b: אֲבֵל אִשָּׁה־אַלְמָנָה אֲנִי וַיָּמָת אִישִׁי; 'Surely I am a widow. My husband has died') and closes with direct (first-person) language as she draws out the implications if her remaining son is killed (וְכָבוֹ אֶת־גִּחְלָתִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאָרָה לְבִלְתִּי שׁוֹם־ (שִׁים־) לְאִישִׁי שָׁם) 'and they extinguish my ember which is left [and] my husband's name and remnant is not set upon the face of the earth'; v.7c). In between she uses the deferential שִׁפְחָתָךְ when she narrates the fictional fratricide (vv.6-7b). The use of direct language

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sometimes narrated with acts of obeisance to the hearer. Those in Genesis (18:2; 19:1; 23; 33:3; 42:6; 50:18) are discussed in Chapter 7. See also 1 Kgs 18:7 [Obadiah to Elijah]).

<sup>73</sup> Shulman, 'Particle,' 74. See also his discussion on pp. 67 and 71. C.f. Christiansen, 'Linguistic,' 390, and Wilt, 'Sociolinguistic,' 248.

<sup>74</sup> Politeness is not used when the speaker and hearer agree a subject matter is urgent, or the speaker has considerable power over the hearer, or the face threat is small. See Chapter 2.3.1.

<sup>75</sup> Ackroyd, *Samuel*, 131.

<sup>76</sup> Chapter 5.3, and fns 26-27. See also Jeremy M. Hutton, "'Abdi-Aširta, the Slave, the Dog": Self-Abasement and Invective in the Amarna letters, the Lachish Letters, and 2 Sam 3:8', *ZA* 15/16 (2002/2003) 2-18. A number of psalms open with the same imperative (e.g. Pss 7, 12, 54, 69, 146) or include it as part of requests (e.g. Pss 3:7; 20:9; 60:5; 86:16; 106:47; 119:94). C.f. Ruth 3:9: the perfect וּפָרַשְׁתָּ is used as an imperative by the socially junior Ruth to Boaz in the context of a large request.

emphasises her situation and the loss of her husband's name if the remaining son is subject to the death penalty for his fratricide. It is the loss of the family name which the woman uses to get a clear ruling from the king to protect her 'son', so it can be argued that the direct language is deliberate (i.e. emotional, therefore customary deference is abandoned) to arouse the sympathy of the king. In contrast, in stating the facts of the case, conventional deference can be used. This has the same effect as her obeisance: to indicate the social distance between her and the king, and his power over her.

Master-slave deference is, however, abandoned in the rest of the woman's speaking that precedes the ruling that she wants—and gets—at the end of v.11. The only hint of such deference is a sole use of אדני in apposition to המלך in v.9, her 'blame taking' statement. Instead, she uses the third-person המלך for David, along with the first-person for herself.<sup>77</sup> The use of the third person is a politeness strategy, 'impersonalise speaker and hearer' (here, only for the hearer), which works by dissociating the king from the face-threat her speaking contains (Chapter 2.3.1, Table 2). This mix of third person for the king and first person for herself (אני-המלך deference) remains frequent in the ensuing dialogue. This is in contrast to Abigail whose normal style is to use master-slave deference to David. However, the wise woman's style is common in Judg-2 Kgs, and also across the ancient Near East, as has been noted in Chapter 5.3. This style is described by Revell as making appeals 'with emotion and urgency as well as deference,' and shows 'a sophisticated use of language.'<sup>78</sup> The same is the case in prayer, especially in Psalms (see Chapter 8).

The 'blame taking' statement, עלי אדני המלך העון ועל-בית אבי והמלך וכסאו נקי ('upon me, my lord the king, [be] the guilt, and upon my father's house; but the king and his throne [be] innocent'; v.9) is also a form of polite language. It represents two strategies of politeness at once: apologise, and an 'off-record' request. Like Abigail's similar statement in 1 Sam 25:24, it should be understood as an apology that assists the plea instead of putting blame on herself.<sup>79</sup> In pressing David for the ruling she wants, she is effectively saying 'I don't want to

<sup>77</sup> עלי אדני המלך is effectively a vocative, 'my lord, O King'. The use of המלך for David starts proper in the clause, יזכר-נא המלך וכסאו נקי, and continues in v.11 with המלך.

<sup>78</sup> E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen, 1996) 274. Of the Lachish letters discussed in Chapter 5.3, the wise woman's language is closest to *Lachish 4*.

<sup>79</sup> So J. Hoftijzer, 'David and the Tekoite Woman', *VT* 20 (1970) 424-427, citing comparisons with other biblical texts. Politeness theory effectively supports Hoftijzer's argument. Scholarship is aware of Hoftijzer's interpretation, but those who accept it are hesitant to accept it fully (e.g. Lyke, *King David*, 189-190). Most

impinge on you, but ....' However, the statement is also an 'off-record' request that the son be viewed as having no guilt. This explains why David gives his next ruling (v.10) when the woman has not asked directly for it. That is, David recognises the 'blame taking' comment to be a request. As with Abigail's 'off-record' request (which is the point of her speech to David in 1 Sam 25:24-31), it is the most polite strategy available for the woman to use. As indicated in Chapter 2.3.1, it allows the hearer freedom to interpret both what the speaker means and respond as he/she sees fit. David's new ruling, that those who wish to enforce the death penalty on the woman's 'son' must state the case to him first, is a considerable move on his behalf. It implies that the death penalty cannot be invoked automatically. The woman, having got David to make this move, builds on it to ask, invoking YHWH, that her 'son' not be subject at all to the death penalty (v.11). This request is indirect, because the stated request is the invocation (יִזְכְּרֵנָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֱתֵיְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ; 'may the king remember the LORD your God'). In contrast to 'off-record' requests, an indirect request requires no interpretation, but like 'off-record' requests, it gives the hearer the option not to act, thus without a loss of face. David gives her this ruling. Because the woman in v.13 applies this to David, it is clear that this is the ruling she wanted all along.

To summarise, the wise woman of Tekoa presents her request to David for a ruling for her fictitious son using similar strategies as Abigail in 1 Samuel 25: apologising, and 'off-record' and indirect requests.<sup>80</sup> Master-slave deference is also used, but is largely confined to her statement of the facts of the fictitious case, being replaced by the third-person *הַמֶּלֶךְ* in conjunction with the first-person as she proceeds.<sup>81</sup> In effect, she dissociates David from the face-threat that her request contains, and allows him freedom to interpret her request. This suits the wider narrative in which David is emotionally involved in his family's troubles (13:21, 31, 37, 39), but does not intervene; that is, does not use his power as king. He needed

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scholars accept or argue that the woman puts blame on herself. See Baldwin, *Samuel*, 254; Gordon, *Samuel*, 267; Ackroyd, *Samuel*, 132; Fokkelman, *King David*, 134; Roger L. Omanson, John E. Ellington, *Handbook on the First and Second Books of Samuel, Volume 2* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001) 905. Alter, *David Story*, 277, understands the woman's comment to reflect an unwillingness of David to take up the case because it is too close to the unavenged murder of Amnon. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 348, thinks the statement is not original to the story.

<sup>80</sup> These two request forms should be seen as part of the dramatic tension. C.f. Nicol, 'Wisdom of Joab,' 99: the dragged out final ruling is done to create suspense for the reader, and so add interest to the story; and L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (Historic Texts and Interpreters in Biblical Scholarship 1; trans. M. Rutter, D.M. Gunn; Sheffield: Almond, 1982) 90: 'It is dialogue ... which has the power to create scenes.'

<sup>81</sup> This goes against descriptions of the woman's style as 'courtier-like', such as argued in George G. Nicol, 'The Wisdom of Joab and the Wise Woman of Tekoa', *StudT* 36 (1982) 99.

to be dissociated from his emotions. In contrast, master-slave deference is more prominent in Abigail's appeal. This highlights power differentiation, since David is portrayed as having the power to kill all the men of Abigail's household.

### 6.3.2.3. THE WOMAN'S CRITICISM OF THE KING (14:12-17)

Now that she has a clear ruling that the death penalty will not be enforced on her fictitious son, the woman applies it to the situation of Absalom. She starts very deferentially (v.12): a request to speak cast in master-slave deference that is equal to the best in biblical narrative (e.g. Gen 44:18-34; 2 Sam 19:34-37), along with a jussive with **נא** (חֲדַבְרֵנָּא). Both features are conventional politeness.<sup>82</sup> The use of deference, as already noted, reduces threat to the hearer's face by acknowledging the power relation between the two. The woman's language prepares for the shocking revelation that her case was a ruse. As noted in Section 6.2.2.5 for David's reply to Abigail, David's response to allow her to speak is typical of the role of a social superior in dialogue.<sup>83</sup>

In v.13a, the woman drops her respectful language and directly addresses David with a question, **וְלֹמָה חֲשַׁבְתָּה כֹּזֶאת עַל־עַם אֱלֹהִים** ('And why did you plan like this against the people of God?'). The question is noted for its direct language and bluntness.<sup>84</sup> The question works as an accusation, but the content is stated in v.13b: David, in giving his ruling in v.11, is now guilty by not bringing back 'his banished one' (**נִדְחוֹ**). In v.13b, respectful language is resumed, by means of third person references (**הַמֶּלֶךְ**) and referring to Absalom indirectly (**נִדְחוֹ**). The indirect reference to Absalom also represents the woman's ultimate request (to have Absalom recalled) and the whole point of her going to David. Thus the accusation is an indirect request, which, as has been discussed for v.11, allows David the freedom to respond. Lyke considers ambiguity to be present (that is, the accusation is an 'off-record' request) and argues that the woman's language presents three options to David: kill Absalom, bring

<sup>82</sup> See respectively Chapter 4.2.9 and Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 66-67; and Section 6.2 and fn.22.

<sup>83</sup> From Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 74. The use of the imperative (**דַּבְרִי**) should be understood as giving permission, not a command. See E.A. Cowley, E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §110b; J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar: Syntax* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994] §66 (c.f. Ex 10:24; 2 Sam 18:23); and B.K. Waltke, M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990] §34.4b.

<sup>84</sup> E.g. Fokkelman, *King David*, 135 ('plain language'; comes 'home hard'); Baldwin, *Samuel*, 254 ('blunt attack on the king'); Gordon, *Samuel*, 267 ('the petitioner turns preacher and charges the king with failure ...').

Absalom home, or leave Absalom in exile.<sup>85</sup> However, it is clear that the woman refers to bringing back Absalom (השיב המלך את־נדהו), and David's eventual response to recall Absalom indicates he understood her correctly.

In order to remain respectful to David, and ensure his cooperation to recall Absalom, the woman needs to explain herself (vv.14-17). As noted for David and Abigail in Section 6.2, giving reasons is obvious when requests are made, but it is a politeness strategy in its own right (Chapter 2.3.1, Table 1). The woman's accusation/indirect request, which shows also that her legal case was fictitious, has resulted in face-loss for David (he has condemned and judged his own actions). This has to be redressed. There is considerable discussion as to the meaning behind the woman's reasons and why she refers again to her fictitious case.<sup>86</sup> Logically, they work by her use of inheritance language to tie Absalom's fate (as possibly David's now-heir apparent, since Amnon is dead) with the fate of the nation. Therefore, if David does not act to recall Absalom from exile, then he sins against the nation. Her 'theological' reason in v.14b, that even God is merciful to people who deserve the death penalty (David is a case in point: he has been 'forgiven' by God for his adultery and murder [12:23]), sets the precedent for David to forgive Absalom.

The woman's reasons also contain within them a range of politeness strategies to assist their ability to redress David's loss of face. She continues with אֲנִי-הַמֶּלֶךְ deference. However, master-slave deference is now also used frequently, with both שִׁפְחָתְךָ and אִמְתְּךָ for herself and אֲדֹנָי for David (vv.15-17). אֲדֹנָי is mostly used in apposition to הַמֶּלֶךְ. These forms of respect continue the woman's awareness of her status as subject of the king and his power over her. Despite her criticism of her king and her theologizing, the woman claims she is not David's teacher. The use of שִׁפְחָתְךָ and אִמְתְּךָ should be understood as synonymous, despite אִמְתְּךָ appearing in the woman's reports of her self-talk (vv.15d, 16) and שִׁפְחָתְךָ being used to introduce those reports (vv.15c, 17). When compared to Abigail's speech to David (1 Sam 25:24-31), this use of the two terms seems to be simply personal preference. A full discussion of the two terms is given in Appendix 1.1.

<sup>85</sup> Lyke, *King David*, 186-189.

<sup>86</sup> See, e.g. Hoftijzer, 'David,' 442-444; Fokkelman, *King David*, 136-138; Bergen, *Samuel*, 391-392 (good summary of the woman's theological argument); Gordon, *Samuel*, 268; and Hertzberg, *Samuel*, 332-333. McCarter argues that vv.15-17 are misplaced, and should be placed after v.7 (*II Samuel*, 345-347), a proposal liked by Mauchline (*Samuel*, 266). This obviates the problem of why the woman returns to her case, but it is easy enough to explain the text as it stands.

#### 6.3.2.4. THE WOMAN'S DISCLOSURE OF JOAB'S INVOLVEMENT (14:18-20)

At the end of giving her reasons (v.17b), the woman engages in what appears to be flattery, which continues in vv.19-20<sup>87</sup> when she has to reveal to David that Joab instigated everything. She describes the king as *כי כמלאך האלהים כן אדני המלך לשמע הטוב והרע*; ('for like an angel from God thus is my lord the king in hearing good and evil'; v.17), *הכם כחכמת מלאך* ('wise with the wisdom of the angel of God to know everything which is in the land'; v.20b), and *אם-אש להמין ולהשמיל מכל אשר-דבר אדני המלך* ('there is no one who cannot go to the right or to the left from all that my lord the king says'; v.19c). That is, the woman tells the king he is wise and knows everything, rather like God.<sup>88</sup> Certainly the king has shown discernment in recognising Joab's involvement in the woman's fiction, but in the wider narrative, the woman's flattery is simply that: the king has shown, and will show again, no wisdom in dealing with family members.<sup>89</sup> Joab's use of a wise woman and a fictional legal case is also proof of David's overall lack of wisdom.

Without denying that the woman flatters the king, her comments can be interpreted as politeness: 'exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H).' Exaggerated comments about the hearer is a strategy that conveys to the hearer that he is interesting, which in turn sets up common ground for the communication (Chapter 2.3.1, Table 1). Here, common ground is being re-established after face-loss has occurred; that is, the woman is redressing David's loss of face after accusing him of wrong and for revealing Joab's machinations in her dialogue. That her flattery is designed to defuse offence caused has been recognised without the use of politeness theory,<sup>90</sup> but politeness theory affirms the recognition is correct. Since David is yet

<sup>87</sup> Noted in Hoftijzer, 440-441, 443; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 347; Fokkelman, *King David*, 141, 143; Baldwin, *Samuel*, 255; and Gordon, *Samuel*, 268. The scholars after Hoftijzer tend to be influenced by his article.

<sup>88</sup> There is the possibility that the woman's flattery reflects royal ideology (see Gordon, *Samuel*, 268-269 [implied]; Ackroyd, *Samuel*, 133 [implied]; argued against by McCarter [*II Samuel*, 347]). However, whether the narrative reflects a fully developed royal ideology (15:3-4 plays on the ideal of the king giving justice) and so late composition, or a nascent ideology drawn from surrounding Canaanite culture which permits early composition, is immaterial to my argument.

<sup>89</sup> C.f. Alter, *David Story*, 279.

<sup>90</sup> See, notably Hertzberg, *Samuel*, 333 ('She already knows that the victory is hers, but as a really 'wise woman' she must let the man appear the victor.'). and Hoftijzer, 'David,' 141, 143-144 ('She must avoid [him] feeling deceived,' the woman has to excuse her behaviour, to 'smooth down the effect of [her] confession'). Both comments were made before politeness theory was developed. Hoftijzer's interpretation is accepted by McCarter (*II Samuel*, 347) and Fokkelman (*King David*, 141, 143). C.f. Bergen, *Samuel*, 392; and Baldwin, *Samuel*, 255 (commenting on *ויהוה אלהיך יהי עמך*).

to make the formal decision to recall Absalom, her flattery is also designed to encourage him to make that decision: in doing so he will be similar to the angel of God. This may be the reason why she uses an oath, *as surely as you live, my lord the king* (v.19b) before her flattery in v.19c.

Amongst all this flattery, the woman continues her mix of master-slave and אֲנִי-הַמֶּלֶךְ deference. However, the king appears apparently polite in his introductory question, אֲלֵ-נָא תִכְחֲדֵי מִמֶּנִּי (‘please do not hide from me ...’;<sup>91</sup> v.18a) by using the particle נָא. The use of נָא with אֵל (as אֵל-נָא) and the second person jussive is rare in biblical Hebrew narrative, and even rarer for a social superior to use, though it is common enough with imperatives and third person jussives.<sup>92</sup> Shulman understands נָא in all contexts to turn a command into a request, and mostly in contexts of requesting a personal favour from the hearer, regardless of their relative status.<sup>93</sup> According to this understanding, the ‘personal favour’ David requests is that the woman reveal her ruse and Joab’s involvement in it (v.19). Christiansen, also covering all three verbal forms, understands the use of נָא to show that even social superiors and equals recognise ‘some of the limits of imposition’ when they make requests.<sup>94</sup> However, Wilt shows that this use of נָא fits a pattern of use in the Hebrew Bible when the speaker changes the term of a relationship. Wilt does not include Josh-2 Kgs in his discussion, but of the situations he suggests that would prompt the use of נָא, the situation in which only the hearer can provide information to the speaker is closest to v.18.<sup>95</sup> Obviously, the narrator could have David call Joab into his presence and ask the same question to him. What is clear, however, is that the dialogue changes from this point onwards. David now takes control. Thus, in line with Wilt’s suggestions, David’s use of נָא is a polite marker that a change in relationship is occurring. In v.19, David resumes his usual direct way, typical with his status as social superior to the woman.

<sup>91</sup> The second person jussive with אֵל is equivalent to a command, ‘do not ...’ (Shulman, ‘Particle,’ 65).

<sup>92</sup> Of the examples of אֵל-נָא with second person jussive that Shulman gives as ‘a superior requesting a personal favour’ (Num 22:16; 2 Sam 14:18) (‘Particle,’ 66), only 2 Sam 14:18 is unambiguously clear. In Num 22:16, King Balak sends a message to the prophet Balaam, but prophets are generally portrayed as superior in status to all other people when they act in their role as spokespeople for deity. For statistics on the infrequency of human rulers using נָא when addressing subjects, see Wilt, ‘Sociolinguistic,’ 247 (using narratives from the Pentateuch).

<sup>93</sup> Shulman, ‘Particle,’ 62, 65-66.

<sup>94</sup> Christiansen, ‘Linguistic Analysis,’ 383.

<sup>95</sup> Wilt, ‘Sociolinguistic,’ 248.



### 6.3.2.5. JOAB'S RESPONSE TO DAVID'S DECISION (14:21-22)

David's decision to recall Absalom (v.21) is the high point in the changed relationship between David and the wise woman. As discussed for David in Section 6.2.2.5, granting requests is typical of a social superior in biblical narrative. David's questioning of the woman also shows that, though he has been manipulated by the woman's politeness, the decision is his alone. In response, Joab is all politeness (v.22): obeisance, master-slave deference (עבדו/עבדך<sup>96</sup>), and third-person reference to the king. As has been indicated for the woman's use of these forms of respect, they are part of conventional politeness.

However, as has been noted above (Section 6.3.2.1), Joab is normally portrayed as addressing David using direct ('bald-on-record') speech. For him to be narrated as engaging in 'courtly' language and obeisance is highly unusual. The only other occurrence is in 2 Sam 24:3 // 1 Chr 21:3. His non-verbal action and his deferential language should therefore be seen as self-abasement on his part, in similar fashion to Abigail's self-abasement in 1 Sam 25:41. As discussed for 1 Sam 25:32-33 and 41 above (Sections 6.2.2.5-6), self-abasement means the speaker humbles his/her own face. By doing so, they avoid being indebted to the hearer. Joab of course could be using politeness simply to avoid David getting angry. But in light of the wider narrative's portrayal of him, this is not normally a problem for him (he is the one who gets angry at David!), so an avoidance of indebtedness to David remains the best interpretation of Joab's speaking. Joab will bring Absalom to Jerusalem, but as early as 1 Sam 14:28-33, he reflects his typical independence from both his king, and from Absalom also.

Joab also, unusually for biblical texts, gives thanks directly for the king's decision: היום ידע עבדך כי־מצאתי חן בעיניך אדני המלך אשר־עשה המלך את־דבר עבדו ('Today your servant knows I have found favour in your eyes, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant'). The only other occurrences of direct giving of thanks in biblical narrative are found in 2 Sam 6:14 and Ruth 2:13. Otherwise, self-abasement is used (which also occurs in Ruth 2:13), or the speaker accepts being obligated to the hearer (in Psalms, obligation to God is expressed as promises to worship God according to the cult; see Chapter 8.2.1). However, the

<sup>96</sup> The MT contains a *Qere* reading of עבדך for עבדו at the end of v.22. However, עבדו works well in the context by placing Joab's thanks fully into third-person speech, which dissociates David from the face loss he has faced by being manipulated. Consequently, Joab is not obligated to David for having answered his request favourably.

use of הָן in Joab's thanks serves also as a strategy to avoid being indebted to the hearer: David is in effect being described as generous and so his standing (that is, face) in the community is increased. Joab's rare use of obeisance, deference and thanks defuses in the most extreme manner available to him David's loss of face due to the manipulation which he subjected him. All three features combine to make David's decision appear to be given without manipulation.<sup>97</sup>

### 6.3.3. Conclusions

As with David's request to Nabal, and Abigail's request to David in 1 Sam 25, the polite language used by the wise woman of Tekoa is appropriate for her role as a legal supplicant to David. Her use of obeisance, deference, third-person references to the king, apologising ('taking blame'), and 'off-record' and indirect requests to have Absalom recalled all serve to encourage David to respond favourably. Like Abigail, she as subject and 'servant' of the king is the master of the situation. The difference between her and Abigail is that the wise woman could not change her role and status, whereas Abigail could have been portrayed as socially superior to David the outlaw and yet have the narrative still work (i.e. she could 'baldly' criticise David). Once the wise woman drops her façade, she uses flattery as the main politeness strategy to redress the loss of face she has caused David. Her flattery is a form of exaggerated interest in what the king is supposed to be (wise, making decisions like the angel of God would), which no doubt would appeal to any vanity he may have had, and any royal ideology that may be present in the Samuel narratives. But it also is designed to make his decision to recall Absalom seem like the right thing to do; that is, YHWH would do it, if YHWH were to rule on Absalom's situation.

Generally the wise woman's language is consistent in her mix of master-slave and אֲנִי-הַמֶּלֶךְ deference. However, there is some variation according to topic. Her accusatory question in v.13a is put in direct language; but this is introduced with a highly polite request to speak further (v.12), using consistent master-slave deference for herself and the king, and a jussive coupled with אֲנִי. Both features are conventional politeness. In her fictitious self-talk (vv.15-

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<sup>97</sup> For this topic of self-abasement in the context of thanks, see Appendix 1.2.

16), a greater use of master-slave deference is also evident, assumedly showing the seriousness of her decision to go to the king for a ruling.

Joab also is portrayed as highly respectful to David, which is rare for him in the Samuel narratives. This can be explained as him placing on himself the loss of face he has caused David by his ruse, and to portray David's decision to recall Absalom as not being due to manipulation.

#### **6.4. CONCLUSIONS**

The two women in 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14 both use respectful language to get what they want. There are differences between the way they use their language, which can be attributed to both their roles in the story and the situations in which they are placed. Abigail uses obeisance, master-slave deference, apologising, reasons, her main request 'off-record', and an indirect request. First-person and direct address is used when she takes the role of 'prophet' and apologises ('blame taking'). Her aim is to get David to behave as though he is already the king: specifically, to treat Nabal's snub as inconsequential and so spare his life. The wise woman similarly uses obeisance, deference, apologising, reasons, and 'off-record' and indirect requests to get David to behave according to what he already is: a king who needs to make a legal ruling on a member of his family. However, and in contrast to Abigail, the wise woman also regularly uses אני-המלך deference, which is in line with the usual biblical portrayal of people speaking and praying. Direct address is reserved for when she accuses him of guilt, effectively taking the role of a judge of David.

The use of master-slave deference is also different. Abigail keeps her use of 'your servant' only to the context of making requests, and in her response to David's marriage proposal. The wise woman peppers her speech with 'your servant', with it increasing in her request to speak further (to defuse the face-threat in her accusation) and in her report of her self-talk about coming to the king. In 2 Sam 14, the use of שפחתך and אמתך are entirely conventional (lexical), whereas in 1 Sam 25, the latent association of שפחתך, אמתך and עבדך with slavery as 'inferior status' is exploited in Nabal's snub of David (vv.10-11) and Abigail's response to David's marriage proposal (v.41). Joab's use of deference in 2 Sam 14:22, though entirely conventional, is noteworthy as it contrasts with the usual portrayal of him in the Samuel

narratives as being direct with David. However, the setting of 2 Sam 14:1-22 suits the wider narrative's portrayal of Joab as being frequently in opposition to David's immediate wishes.

The narrative of 1 Sam 25 is open to multiple interpretations, due to its portrayal of David in a bad light, and the ambiguity that is inherent in both his polite language to Nabal and Abigail's polite language to him. In contrast, the narrative 2 Sam 14 uses ambiguity as part of the plot: in the way the reasons are given for Joab's use of the wise woman; in the way she uses respectful language; and the fictitious legal case to manipulate David to recall Absalom. This ambiguity is consistent with the ambiguity in the wider narrative: David's refusal to reconcile with Absalom (2 Sam 14:23-24, 28-33) and Absalom's reasons for organising his rebellion (15:1-6). Reasons are not given as to why David refuses to be reconciled with Absalom and, despite Absalom's focus on the issue of justice (which may look back to the lack of justice given for Amnon's rape of Tamar [13:21]),<sup>98</sup> his real motivation may be different since the narrator has not placed Absalom's comments in a direct narrative statement.<sup>99</sup>

On the matter of master-slave deference, both 1 Samuel 25 and 2 Samuel 14 show that it is the language of a speaker who is socially inferior to a hearer, which is typical in the Hebrew Bible. In all cases, no matter whether it is conventional language or slavery associations are drawn out, the use of slave terms in deference draws upon that association of slavery, 'inferior status'. However, both texts have the language as part of a range of polite speech strategies and used by speakers who are not submissive in intent. If anything, the language subverts the power relationships portrayed: the deferential requestor uses deference to assist the creation of an identity that will encourage the more powerful hearer to respond in the way he/she wishes him/her to respond. This is the point of polite language: language is kept ambiguous, and when the hearer responds in the way the speaker wishes him/her to do so, then the speaker has in effect executed power over the hearer. That it does not always work is shown by Nabal's snub of David (1 Sam 25:10-11), but the biblical narratives show that it usually works. When it works, the 'slave' has become the 'master.' This is seen clearly in 2 Sam 14 when David in v.18 finally takes control of the dialogue with the wise woman. She resorts to flattery to

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<sup>98</sup> C.f. Kieth W. Whitlam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSS 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979) 137-148. Whitlam does not indicate if 1 Sam 13:21 was a factor in Absalom's thinking, rather he argues that David's court was corrupt or inadequate in delivering justice to the people, which Absalom exploited.

<sup>99</sup> Alter, 'Character,' 59; c.f. Amit, "The Glory of Israel," 201-212.

compensate for the loss of control. The way master-slave deference is used in narrative is important for studies in how it is used in prayer, since it gives social settings that can be assumed to lie behind the use of master-slave deference in prayer. As discussed in Chapter 8, master-slave deference is also a strategy that is used by worshippers when praying to create a favourable impression of themselves to God in the hope he will grant them any requests they make. The next chapter starts to move the study in this direction as it looks at the use of master-slave deference in Genesis, which includes characters praying to and/or interacting with God and angelic messengers.



**CHAPTER 7**  
**THE USE OF ‘SERVANT’ BY CHARACTERS IN NARRATIVE PART 2:**  
**GENESIS 12-50**

**7.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 6 has shown how politeness theory and metaphor theory can be applied to two major examples of deferential language in the Books of Samuel. The two texts, 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14:1-22, were chosen because the characters who used master-slave deferential language in each text were not necessarily implying submissiveness to the hearer despite their real or constructed roles as socially inferior to their respective hearers. This allowed the finding that polite language is used to assist with gaining a favourable response from the hearer. Despite the commonality of master-slave deference used by four characters in the two narratives (David to Nabal, Abigail to David, wise woman to David, Joab to David), the narratives also showed variation in the metaphoricity of that deference. 2 Samuel 14 keeps master-slave deference fully lexicalised, but 1 Samuel 25 keeps it metaphorically alive.

This chapter continues this analysis of master-slave deference and other polite language, but broadens the context. Gen 12-50 provides a suitably wide range of contexts for the use of polite language. Using Genesis permits an analysis of polite language from a different author/compiler from that of 1-2 Samuel, yet all contexts analysed are contained in the one book. The latter allows for discussion on how subject matter determines the type of language used, even if the final compiler/s may have inserted conventional language in the individual narratives. The former allows for comparison with the work of another compiler/editor to indicate how conventional forms of polite language may have been used in Israelite culture.

This chapter discusses the uses of master-slave deference, both in the form, עבדך/עבדיך-אדני, and אנהנו\אני-אדני. Discussion is also given for those situations in which master-slave deference is not used.

## **7.2. MASTER-SLAVE DEFERENTIAL LANGUAGE IN GENESIS 12-50**

### **7.2.1. Introduction**

In the speaking interactions in Genesis 12-50, including prayer and dialogue to God/angels, master-slave deference is frequently employed. The עבדך\עבדיך-אדני form of deference predominates. The most notable examples are Jacob's speaking to Esau in 33:1-16 and Judah's plea to the unknown-to-him Joseph in 44:18-34. In both cases, Jacob and Judah are highly deferential, to the point of possibly being the most obsequious in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> Other speeches in which עבדך\עבדיך-אדני deference occurs include 18:1-5 (Abraham to three visitors); 19:2, 18-20 (Lot to two angels); 32:5-6 [4-5] (Jacob's message to Esau); 32:10-13 [9-12] (Jacob's prayer); 42:1-44:17 (various speeches by Joseph's brothers to him or his steward); 46:31-47:6 (Joseph's brothers to Pharaoh, instructed by Joseph [46:34]); and 50:15-18 (the brothers to Joseph after Jacob's death).

A reduced form of deferential language, 'my lord-I/we' (אני-אדני), occurs in a number of contexts: 18:23-32 (Abraham's bargaining with YHWH over the fate of Sodom); 23:3-16 (the Hittites' side of negotiations with Abraham over a burial site for Sarah); 47:18-19 (the Egyptians interaction with Joseph during the famine); and 31:35 (Rachel's claim to Laban her father that she is menstruating). Despite commenting in chapters 5 and 6 that אנהנו\אני-אדני deference is typical in the Hebrew Bible, it is less used in the Genesis narratives than עבדך\עבדיך-אדני deference.

This section (7.2) argues that master-slave deference appears mostly in two contexts in the Book of Genesis: when speakers feel they are in real danger; and when speakers offer hospitality to visitors. The first is the most frequent context.

### **7.2.2. Speeches and dialogues in which עבדך-אדני deference appears**

#### **7.2.2.1. JACOB'S MEETING WITH ESAU (33:1-16)**

Jacob's meeting with his brother Esau (Gen 33:1-16) provides an interesting context for the use of deferential and polite language. As indicated in Chapter 4.2.9.1.2, the use of master-

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<sup>1</sup> A similar level of obsequiousness is also found in 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 7:18-29 and 2 Sam 19.



slave deference to a social equal, let alone a family member, is unusual. A feature of the dialogue is Jacob's continual use of *אדני* and *עבדך* whereas Esau uses familial language (*אחי*). Esau does not correct Jacob's language,<sup>2</sup> which occasions discussion as to what is intended by Jacob's deference. Jacob's bowing and calling Esau *אדני* and himself *עבדך* is recognised as ironic when compared with 27:29 where Jacob is predicted to 'be lord over his brothers' (*היה* גביר לאחיו; 27:29).<sup>3</sup> A common interpretation of this clash of language is that Jacob negotiates a treaty with Esau with himself as vassal.<sup>4</sup> Cotter suggests a psychological interest by the narrator: 'Perhaps it feels good, and seems just, for Esau to hear Jacob humble himself in Esau's presence.'<sup>5</sup>

Connected with these interpretations is Jacob's intention with the gift he sent to Esau (32:14-22[13-21]). Despite Jacob's clear statement in his self-talk in 32:21[20] that it was meant to 'cover his (i.e. Esau's) face' (*אכפרה פניו*) so that Esau will forgive him (*ישא פני*: 'he will lift my face'), ambiguity is created by Jacob's use of both *מנחה* (32:14, 21 [13, 20] and 33:10) and *ברכה* (in 33:11) for the gift. *מנחה* can mean tribute, which gives support to the view that Jacob seeks to be a vassal of Esau. However, his language of 32:21[20] is also used in the religious sphere in the context of offerings for forgiveness from YHWH (c.f. Lev 1:4; 2:1-14; 4:20, 26, 31).<sup>6</sup> Ambiguity is also present because 32:21[20] is self-talk. Self-talk, being something a character says, is less authorial than a statement by the narrator, giving only 'relative certainty' about intentions.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, that Jacob intends something else remains a possibility. Consequently, the change from *מנחה* to *ברכה* in 33:11 permits the common interpretation that Jacob wishes to give to Esau the stolen blessing of chapter 27.<sup>8</sup> But Jacob can also be

<sup>2</sup> David W. Cotter, *Genesis* (Berit Olam; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003) 249, 251.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 229; Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 289. *גבר* ('lord') is only found in Gen 37: 29, 37. The feminine equivalent *גבירה* means mistress (16:6-8) or queen mother (2 Kgs 10:13) (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* [WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994] 210).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996) 179; Cotter, *Genesis*, 243, 248-251; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (trans. J.J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 525. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005) 454, and Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 346, also talk in terms of Jacob being a vassal but ultimately view him as in a subject-to-a-king relationship with Esau.

<sup>5</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 251.

<sup>6</sup> See Mathews, *Genesis*, 570, and Wenham, *Gen 16-50*, 292; and canvassed by Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 455. Compare Sarna, *Genesis*, 230.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 2.4.1 and application of this principle in Chapter 6 to 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14:1-22.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. Westermann, *Gen 12-36*, 526; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 288-289; Kass, Leon R., *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003) 470; Arnold, *Genesis*, 289 (a replacement for the

interpreted as making reparation or restitution for the stolen blessing,<sup>9</sup> which is in line with his self-talk in 32:21[20]. But it might be that Jacob's language is intentionally ambiguous: 'Esau is free to interpret it [the intention of the gift] as he wishes'.<sup>10</sup> The discussion on Jacob's intention generally omits that Jacob cannot give the blessing to Esau, since the blessing was not his right to give.<sup>11</sup> In line with this, the narrative also makes it clear that the blessing could not be rescinded (27:33, 37), and even if it could, Isaac is not yet dead (35:27).

An analysis of Gen 33:1-17 using politeness, metaphor and narrative theory will assist in resolving such matters, but the purpose of using these theories is to analyse how Jacob's polite language and deference achieves his goals.

The structure of the dialogue is:

- Introduction (vv.1-4) Jacob and Esau meet; Jacob bows to Esau
- Round 1 (vv.5-7) Esau asks about the family; Jacob focuses on the children
- Round 2 (v.8) Esau asks about the gift; Jacob says it is to find favour
- Round 3 (vv.9-11) Esau objects to receiving the gift; Jacob insists he accept it
- Round 4 (vv.12-14) Esau asks to accompany Jacob; Jacob refuses
- Round 5 (vv.15) Esau offers protection; Jacob refuses
- Conclusion (vv.16-17) Esau and Jacob go their separate ways

Esau initiates all rounds of the dialogue, but it is Jacob who gets what he wants from it. As Cotter notes, 'Jacob is effusive in his gestures of self-deprecation, but Esau does not gainsay him.'<sup>12</sup> The only action of initiating Jacob does is to bow down to Esau ahead of his family (v.3). Such action is a form of the negative politeness strategy, 'give deference', which is continued with Jacob's עֲבֹדָה אֲדֹנָי deference to Esau in the dialogue (vv.5, 8, 13-15). Jacob places himself in the role of social inferior to Esau. What this role implies, as noted above, is

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original); William D. Reayburn, Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (New York: United Bible Society, 1997) 777 (Jacob offers 'to share the blessing').

<sup>9</sup> For restitution, see Alter, *Genesis*, 186; Mathews, *Genesis*, 570; John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendricksen, 2000) 289. For reparation, see Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 346; Waltke, *Genesis*, 455; and Sarna, *Genesis*, 230. Paul R. Noble, 'Esau, Tamar, and Joseph: Criteria for Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions', *VT* 52 (2002) 238, n.19, argues that Jacob's change in terms represents an expression of goodwill.

<sup>10</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 227.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 289, though Arnold argues Jacob's bowing (v.3) represents a forfeiture of the promise of lordship in 27:29.

<sup>12</sup> Cotter, *Genesis*, 249. C.f. Mathews, *Genesis*, 568; also Waltke, *Genesis*, 452: Jacob is a 'shrewd but nonmalevolent diplomat.'

debated: is Jacob acting as a vassal, trying to negate the stolen blessing of chapter 27, or simply using deferential language and action to appease his brother? Jacob's seven-fold obeisance (וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה שִׁבְעָה פְעָמִים), which parallels a common element in prostration formulae in Amarna, Ugaritic and Hittite correspondence,<sup>13</sup> no doubt encourages the interpretation that Jacob acts as a vassal toward Esau, being used frequently by vassals to an overlord.<sup>14</sup>

However, as the dialogue proceeds, Jacob's preferred style of deference is אֲנִי-אֲדֹנִי, shown most clearly in rounds 4 and 5, in which Jacob refuses to accompany Esau or allow Esau's men to accompany him. The only use of עַבְדְּךָ-אֲדֹנִי deference by Jacob in this part of the dialogue is in his counter request in v.14a, יַעֲבֹר־נָא אֲדֹנִי לִפְנֵי עַבְדִּי ('Please let my lord pass over before his servant'). The reduction in deference should not be seen as less polite. Vv.13-14 function as 'giving reasons' for the counter-request of v.14a. V.15b, Jacob's response to Esau's request that some of his men accompany him, is an 'off-record' statement that has the intention of 'no' (אֲמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי, 'let me find favour in the eyes of my lord'). As indicated in Chapter 2.3.1, 'off-record' requests are the most polite strategy, allowing the hearer the freedom to interpret the request and then act on it as s/he sees fit. The natural ambiguity in off-record statements gives the impression that Jacob lies to Esau,<sup>15</sup> but Jacob's intent of refusing to travel with Esau is increasingly being recognised.<sup>16</sup> Jacob 'could not refuse him directly without offending him and risking his anger.'<sup>17</sup>

In vv.10-11 (Jacob's turn in the third round) Jacob's language is surprisingly direct, with deference being absent. It is surprising because Jacob insists that Esau accept his בְּרָכָה/מְנַחֵה of

<sup>13</sup> See Harry A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (SBLWAW 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) 29-30, for a brief discussion. For the argument that 'seven times' obeisance was standard courtly protocol, see Samuel E. Loewenstamm, 'Prostration from afar in Ugaritic, Accadian and Hebrew', *BASOR* 188 (1967) 41-43, hinted at also by Hoffner (p.32), citing others.

<sup>14</sup> This is especially so in the Amarna corpus. The same cannot be argued from the Ugaritic letters. Scholarship has not yet examined whether the use of prostration formulae in these letters is restricted to certain types of relationships (e.g. vassal-overlord, subject-king, official-king/lord) or was common protocol before any royalty. Studies done so far simply correlate the use of epistolary formulae with relative status between sender and recipient. See, e.g. Robert Hawley, *Studies in Ugaritic Epistolography* (Dissertation, University of Chicago; Ann Arbor: Proquest [University Microfilms], 2003) 49-63, and F. Brent Knutson, 'Literary genres in *PRU* IV', in *Ras Shamra Parallels* (AnOr 50; 2 vols; ed., L.R. Fisher; Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975, vol. 2) 206. Both scholars, however, argue that when the prostration is not used, relative status is small. This agrees with politeness theory which, as indicated in Chapter 2.3.1, states that when social distance (D) and/or power difference (P) is small, politeness forms reduce.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 346-347; Sarna, *Genesis*, 231.

<sup>16</sup> Arnold, *Genesis*, 290; Reyburn and Fry, *Handbook*, 780; Mathews, *Genesis*, 571; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 300. C.f. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 527: 'The decision to separate, veiled though it is ...'

<sup>17</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 456.

chapter 32, and the rest of the dialogue hinges on this acceptance. However, like for vv.13-15, deference is replaced by other forms of polite language. In fact, vv.10-11 contain the greatest concentration of polite forms in the dialogue. This concentration indicates that deference should not be used as the sole criterion to measure politeness in biblical texts. Jacob, in countering Esau's initial refusal to accept the מנחה, starts with the use of נָא in a conditional clause: אֲלֵינָא אִם־נָא מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ ('No, please, if I have found favour in your eyes'). That is, he uses customary softening (נָא) and the negative politeness strategy, 'question, hedging'.<sup>18</sup> His intent is to imply that Esau has already received him favourably, evident by the embracing and tears in v.4. The mention of favour reflects recognition that Esau has power over him.<sup>19</sup> The rest of v.10 is the positive politeness strategy, 'give reasons,' for Jacob's request, 'Please, take the gift' (קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּרִכְתִּי אֲשֶׁר הִבָּאת לְךָ) in v.11a. But it includes the comment that Esau's face 'is like the face of God' (כִּי־עַל־כֵּן רָאִיתִי פָנֶיךָ כְּרֹאֵת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים), which is a use of the positive politeness strategy, 'exaggerate interest to H'. Despite the clear allusion to the incident at Peniel (32:23-31[22-30]), Jacob in effect flatters Esau. As the story is presented, Esau does not know about Jacob's wrestling with God. The flattery works on the assumption that Esau has already received him favourably.

Jacob's request proper, in v.11a, also uses נָא to express politeness.<sup>20</sup> The rest of Jacob's statement (v.11b), which functions as 'give reasons,' is also the strategy 'minimise the imposition' (כִּי־חֲנִנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יִשְׁלִי־כָל); 'because God has shown me favour and I have everything'). The imposition Jacob deals with is his request to take the gift, and the threat to Esau's face is him demeaning himself by accepting the gift too quickly.<sup>21</sup> Jacob minimises the face-threat by inferring the gift costs him little to give it. Despite the direct language used in these strategies, its use in what is essentially giving reasons is in line with what occurs in 1

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 2.3.1, Table 2. Even Westermann, *Gen 12-36*, 523, following one grammar, recognises that 'a conditional clause may express a request'.

<sup>19</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, asking for favour (חֵן) relates to deference: 'The subject of the verb is or acts as if he were in a positive but sub-ordinate formal relationship to the grantor' (W. Malcolm Clark, 'The Righteousness of Noah', *VT* 21 [1971] 262). See also Ina Willi-Plein, 'חֵן: Ein Übersetzungsproblem: Gedanken zu Sach XII 10', *VT* 23 [1973] 93 (cited in Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 278).

<sup>20</sup> Bent Christiansen, 'A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Particle *nā*': A Test Case', *VT* 59 (2009) 391, argues that נָא with the imperative indicates heightened politeness. This may be the case here, since the narrator has Jacob insisting Esau take the gift (v.11c).

<sup>21</sup> This is frequently asserted for the ancient Near East, but without evidence. One exception is Mark W. Hamilton, 'At Whose Table? Stories of Elites and Social Climbers in 1-2 Samuel', *VT* 59 (2009) 519, who combines a scene in the Ugaritic literary text, *The Tale of Kirta*, with social anthropology. Reyburn and Fry, *Handbook*, 33, indicate that the problem of accepting a gift too quickly is a live one in many present day cultures.

Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14, as was discussed in Chapter 6. This suggests a culture of expression that allows for reduced deference when a social inferior engages in the polite activity of giving reasons for a request or statement.

The combination of master-slave deference in the face of Esau's familial language and raft of other politeness strategies indicates Jacob's purposes in his meeting with Esau. First, he wants to ensure his brother receives him favourably, and so waive his right of revenge for the stolen blessing. Second, once this happens, he wishes to remove himself from his brother. Both are big 'impositions' in terms of potential face-threat to Esau. Consequently, Jacob's deferential language is not that of a vassal or a king's subject, despite its similarity to the language of the ancient Near East courts. Rather, he uses it in the recognition that Esau has power to harm him. Esau's embracing of him and tears in 33:4 indicate he is accepted, thus Jacob's first 'ask' changes to an implied request that, by accepting the מנחה, Esau forego any retribution for the stolen blessing and so relinquish his claim on the blessing.<sup>22</sup> That is, the מנחה is reparation. The Hebrew Bible witnesses to the obligations inherent in accepting gifts (e.g. Prov 18:16 and 21:14; evident in David's giving spoils of raids to the leaders of Judah in 1 Sam 30:26-31 and his acceptance by them as king of Judah in 2 Sam 2:4), something that receives support from social anthropology.<sup>23</sup> The narrative indicates awareness of the issues involved in gift giving and acceptance by taking two rounds in the dialogue plus direct narration to resolve the acceptance of Jacob's מנחה. Jacob's second 'ask' has already been noted as an 'off-record' request that Esau accept Jacob's refusal to accompany him or have his men accompany Jacob.

Altogether, Genesis 33:1-17 is an ambiguous text. Esau's intentions, which prompt Jacob to send the gift are not narrated (32:7-9, 14-22 [6-8, 13-21]); Jacob's purposes for the meeting are 'off-record' (hence the misunderstanding that Jacob 'gives back' the stolen blessing); Jacob's deferential and Esau's familial language remains in tension; and the narrator makes no direct comment about the success of the meeting. The debate over Jacob acting as a vassal indicates his use of master-slave deference is lexicalised. But the debate also indicates both

<sup>22</sup> C.f. Noble, 'Esau,' 238, using type-scene analysis, derived from Alter; and Mathews, *Genesis*, 538, using Roland Barthes' structural analysis of Gen 32-33 (Roland Barthes, 'The Struggle with the angel: Textual analysis of Genesis 32-33', in *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* [PTMS; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974] 21-33). That these literary approaches give similar conclusions to my use of politeness theory should caution scholarship about the appropriateness of the interpretation, that Jacob rescinds the blessing.

<sup>23</sup> M. Hamilton, 'At Whose Table?' 519. See also Michelle Stephen, 'Reparation and the gift', *Ethos* 28 (2000) 119-121. Both refer to the important work, Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (trans. W.D. Halls; New York, 1990).

the possibility of latent metaphoricity in Jacob's deference and the pitfalls in trying to draw it out. Because no further problems between Jacob and Esau are narrated, it can be assumed, as is done by those commentators who note Jacob in v.15b as making an implied (i.e. 'off-record') request, that Esau knows that Jacob is making large requests of him, and so has no need to correct his deferential language. That is, Jacob uses master-slave deference to construct an identity of social inferiority to his brother, recognising Esau's power to harm him, and to assist in getting his two requests. Esau knows that Jacob does this. This is in keeping with the wider ancient Near East, which has a long history of people using master-slave deference to social superiors<sup>24</sup>. In this use, master-slave deference draws upon the secondary association of slavery, 'inferior status.'

#### **7.2.2.2. JUDAH'S PLEA TO JOSEPH (44:18-34)**

Judah's plea to the unknown-to-him Joseph (Gen 44:18-34) is universally recognised as very tactful and polite, but it can be considered to be the most deferential of all speech interactions in Genesis.<sup>25</sup> He and his brothers are on their second visit to Egypt to get food supplies during an extensive famine and on this and their previous visit have had to deal with Joseph. During this current visit, Benjamin, their youngest brother and Joseph's full blood-brother, has been accused of theft and faces the punishment of enslavement to Joseph.

The structure of Judah's speech is:

- v.18 Request to speak
- vv.19-32 Reasons for Judah's request
  - vv.19-23 Restatement of previous conversations between the brothers and Joseph<sup>26</sup>
  - vv.24-29 Restatement of a conversation between Judah and his father
  - vv.30-32 Implication if Benjamin remains in Egypt: Jacob will die prematurely
- v.33 The request: Judah to be enslaved instead of his youngest brother

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<sup>24</sup> See Chapters 1.2, fns 28-29; 3.2, fns 2-4; and 6.3.2.2, fn.68 for collections of texts; and Edward J. Bridge, 'Enslaved to an Artifice: a Study into the Truth behind the Title of Deference, "Slave/Servant", as used in the Ancient Near East before the Time of Alexander The Great', *Humanity* 2 (2008) 2-7 [<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Schools/Humanities%20and%20Social%20Science/Humanity/Bridge.pdf>] for a review of master-slave deference across the ancient Near East in all periods.

<sup>25</sup> See the commentaries. C.f. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 425 and citations there.

<sup>26</sup> These retellings do not match the narrative of 42:6-20. In particular is Judah's objection as to why the brothers could not bring their youngest brother with them (44:22). This addition is the basis of Judah's appeal.

v.34 Further reasons: an emotional appeal to avoid seeing his father in distress

Similar to what both David and Abigail do in 1 Sam 25 (vv.8, 32), Judah leaves the request to last.<sup>27</sup>

Judah's deference broadly follows the structure of his speech:

- vv.18-19 עבדך\עבדיך-אדני deference
- vv.20-24 Alternation of אנהנו-אדני (vv.20, 22, 24) and עבדיך-אתה (vv.21, 23) deference on the basis of whose speech is being reported
- vv.25-31a Absence of deference when reporting the conversation with his father
- vv.31b-33 עבדך\עבדיך-אדני deference reinstated
- v.34 Deference abandoned

In addition, Judah uses a raft of other politeness strategies in v.18, and his absence of deference in vv.25-31a is replaced by the designation of Jacob as עבדך. All quoted conversation is put as direct speech, common in the Hebrew Bible, and reflected in Lachish 6:11.<sup>28</sup>

The opening of Judah's speech (v.18), his request for a hearing, is extremely tactful. He uses עבדך-אדני deference, both in the request proper (ידבר־נא עבדך דבר באוני אדני) and in the initial entreaty (בי אדני).<sup>29</sup> For his situation, deference is appropriate. He is a foreigner dealing with a very high Egyptian official. He and his brothers have also had unhappy dealings with this official, and Benjamin is under threat of enslavement due to his 'crime'. That is, Joseph has given them a show of power. The brothers have also previously used עבדך-אדני deference to Joseph and to Joseph's steward, so Judah's continued use of such deference is in keeping with the narrative. The narrator also comments that the brothers' occupation as pastoralists is

<sup>27</sup> This seems to be a pattern in biblical narrative: the same phenomenon occurs in Josh 2:8-13; 1 Sam 20:5-8; 26:18-20; 2 Sam 19:5-7, 34-40; and it occurs in the prayers of 2 Sam 7:18-29; Neh 1:5-11; Dan 9:4-19; and Neh 9:6-37 (here, like for Gen 44, further 'reasons' are given after the request [in v.32]).

<sup>28</sup> In Chapter 5.3, the conventionality of direct quotation and the lack of deference in quotation in the sender's suggested wording for Ya'osh's letter of criticism in Lachish 6 was not discussed. That it occurs provides evidence that the biblical convention regarding quoted speech (direct quotes, lack of deference) reflects ancient Israelite practice. The brothers' restatement of their interaction with Joseph to Jacob in 42:29-34 also shows the same pattern: note the absence of deference in vv.31-32 in contrast to what is narrated in vv.10-11, 13.

<sup>29</sup> בי is a recognised particle of entreaty (so NIV; New JPS; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 567; E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1985) 332; Alter, *Genesis*, 263; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* [trans., J.J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986] 129) but is translated as a vocative in the NRSV and NASB.

abhorrent to Egyptians (43:32; 46:34), which places them very low in the Egyptian social hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> Thus, Judah's deference is customary politeness and appropriate to his situation. His use of נָא with the jussive (יִדְבַּר־נָא) can also be treated as customary ('unmarked') politeness. The similar use of deference by Abigail and the Tekoite woman in 1 Sam 25:24 and 2 Sam 14:12 respectively indicates Judah's politeness is conventional. The three texts suggest that master-slave deference is common convention when requesting a hearing.<sup>31</sup>

The rest of v.18 shows that Judah moves beyond customary politeness to extreme tact. His next statement, a request, וְאַל־יִחַר אַפֶּךָ בַּעֲבֹדְךָ ('and let not your anger kindle against your servant'), functions as the negative politeness strategy, 'apologise'. This statement has the intended meaning, 'I don't want to impinge on you, but ...', and represents Judah's awareness that Joseph has autonomy in granting or otherwise his request for a hearing. However, instead of just taking blame for the face-threat to Joseph that his imposition involves (as did the Tekoite woman and Abigail), Judah focuses on the possibility that Joseph may get angry. His final statement in v.18 supports his apology-request: כִּי כַמֹּד כְּפַרְעֹה ('for you are as Pharaoh'). This functions as 'giving reasons' as well as the positive politeness strategy, 'exaggerate interest to H'. Because of the Egyptian ideology of the divine king, it is possible to interpret Judah's comment as addressing Joseph as if he were a god,<sup>32</sup> but at the least Judah recognises that Joseph has absolute power over him and his brothers, in similar manner to Pharaoh over Egypt, proven by their previous interactions with him.<sup>33</sup> Sarna and Wenham interpret the statement as an implied recognition that Joseph has the power to forgive,<sup>34</sup> which suggests Judah's statement is an 'off-record' request that Joseph pardon Benjamin. However, Judah's formally stated request in v.33 is not for pardon, but for the substitution of himself for Benjamin. It is also noteworthy that, similar to Jacob's request of Esau in 33:10-11, עֲבֹד־אֲדֹנִי

<sup>30</sup> Gen 39:14 and Ex 8:26[22] also allude to this sentiment. However, this attitude by Egyptians towards foreigners is not substantiated by extant epigraphic evidence from Egypt prior to the Hellenistic period. For discussion, see e.g. Arnold, *Genesis*, 357 and fn.636; J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930) 496; Wenham *Genesis 16-50*, 423, 445; and Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1972) 389. Explanations given for the attitude are: Egyptian ritual taboo, on the basis of Herodotus (Mathews, *Genesis*, 791; von Rad, *Genesis*, 389); distrust and fear of nomads by settled peoples (Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 445), or the need for foreign peoples to assimilate into Egyptian culture (Arnold, *Genesis*, 357). Minimalists such as Niels P. Lemche, *Prelude to Israel's Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* (trans. E.F. Maniscalco; Peabody: Hendricksen, 1998) 43, use such a lack of pre-Hellenistic archaeological evidence to argue for a very late date of Genesis.

<sup>31</sup> See also 2 Sam 20:17. An exception is Jer 37:20, but here Jeremiah's request continues a turn in a dialogue.

<sup>32</sup> So Kass, 597.

<sup>33</sup> C.f. Mathews, *Genesis*, 803; Waltke, *Genesis*, 561 (implied).

<sup>34</sup> Sarna, *Genesis*, 306, and Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 426.



deference gives way to *אתה-עבדך* deference, again showing a pattern of reduced deference as other forms of polite language are used.

All the politeness elements in v.18—deference, the use of *נא*, apologising, exaggerated interest—are found in the speeches of Abigail, the Tekoite woman and Jacob. But the concentration of them in one verse marks v.18 for exceptional politeness. Such a concentration of strategies makes a persuasive case for Joseph to hear Judah.

The rest of Judah's speech is relatively straightforward as far as politeness is concerned. Verses 19-32 form the 'give reasons' component to back up the request of v.33. The 'reason' is a restatement of previous interactions by the brothers with Joseph and with their father. As already noted, *עבדך\עבדיך-אדני* deference progressively reduces but is reinstated in full in vv.31b-33, as Judah moves towards, and formally states, his request.<sup>35</sup> As has been discussed for Gen 33:10-11, 2 Sam 14:3-6, and 1 Sam 25:8, 26ff, Judah's speech adds to the pattern of reduced deference when 'reasons' are given for a request. The continuation of *עבדך\עבדיך-אדני* deference<sup>36</sup> in vv.19-24, even though split on the basis of whose speech is reported, and its re-introduction in vv.31b-32, however, shows that Judah is more polite than Jacob, the Tekoite woman, Abigail, and David when it comes to giving reasons for a request. The request proper in v.33, that he be substituted for Benjamin, returns to conventional politeness as discussed for v.18a: *עבדך-אדני* deference and a jussive in conjunction with *נא*. The final verse (v.34), as is universally acknowledged, represents an emotional outburst on Judah's part, even though it functions as a further 'reason' for the request. Judah uses direct address, though he avoids the second person. That is, even though emotion gets the better of Judah, it is contained enough so that he is not portrayed as criticising Joseph for wanting to enslave Benjamin. Instead, the criticism remains implied, that is, 'off-record'. The use of a question, *כי־איך אעלה אל־אבי והנער* ('because how can I go up to my father and there is no youth with me?'), also continues Judah's politeness, as it allows Joseph the freedom to discern his intention behind

<sup>35</sup> C.f. Arnold, *Genesis*, 359: Judah's speech 'begins with the deferential lord-servant references, which gradually diminish as the speech progresses and Judah forgets himself eventually in his emotional fervour.' However, Arnold has forgotten to note Judah's increase in deference in vv.31b-33.

<sup>36</sup> The singular *אדני* in Judah's deference, even though he speaks for the group (*עבדיך*) suits his spokesman role. However, it is common in narrative for *אדני* to be used when a group speaks, implying a spokesman or individuals speaking in turn. See, e.g. Gen 47:18-19, when the Egyptians speak to Joseph.

it: 'I cannot return to my father if the boy is not with me.'<sup>37</sup> Thus Judah is polite to Joseph to the last, even when emotional.

As Gen 45:1-15 shows, Judah got more than what he requested. The threat of enslavement of Benjamin is not just removed, Judah himself is not enslaved and Joseph discloses himself. This is more than what Jacob, the Tekoite woman, and Abigail achieved in their respective speeches, but the narrative requires this as the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams (37:5-11).

With regard to the metaphoricity of Judah's use of עֶבֶד, it remains lexicalised as far as his speech is concerned, in similar fashion to his and his brother's earlier interactions with Joseph in chapters 42-44. As argued above, the use of עֶבֶד is conventional deference for their situation. However, the narrative never loses sight of latent associations of slavery as 'possession' and 'inferior status'. In 43:18 the brothers think they will be enslaved by Joseph, they have offered themselves as slaves to Joseph as punishment for the 'stolen' cup (44:9, 16), and Joseph has insisted he will enslave Benjamin, the apparent thief (44:17; c.f. v.10). Furthermore, the deferential use of עֶבֶד is juxtaposed with the literal use of עֶבֶד in 44:9, 16 and 33. The brothers face the threat that, as inferior-to-Egypt foreigners, they will become Joseph's possession.

#### **7.2.2.3. JOSEPH'S BROTHERS TO JOSEPH AND HIS STEWARD (42:6-44:17)**

As noted above, Joseph's brothers use עֶבֶד\עֶבְדֶיךָ-אֲדֹנִי deference to Joseph and to his steward prior to Judah's eloquent plea to Joseph (42:6-44:17). The occurrences are in 42:10-11, 13 and 44:16 in reference to Joseph, and in 44:7-9 in reference to Joseph's steward. The appropriateness of the deference has been discussed above, but the brothers only use it when they have been accused of crimes: spying (42:9, 12); and the theft of Joseph's silver cup (44:4-6, 14). In the more congenial setting of Joseph's home, אֲדֹנִי is used only in the introduction to the brothers' defence to Joseph's steward of taking home their money for their supplies of their first visit (43:20-22) and עֶבֶד is used only of Jacob when they meet with Joseph in 43:28. The latter situation (v.28), however, has the brothers do obeisance twice (vv.26, 28). This, though conventional as discussed above, is important for the narrative as it

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<sup>37</sup> This is recognised by Reyburn and Fry, *Handbook*, 1002.

shows the fulfilment of Joseph's dreams that his brothers and parents would bow before him (37:5-11).<sup>38</sup> The gift by Jacob is in effect an act of obeisance, helped by his sons bowing to Joseph as his agents. The former situation, the brothers' defence to the steward about money (42:20-22), also functions as an 'off-record' request to the steward, indicated in the brothers' self-talk of 43:18 that they not be enslaved for the apparent theft of that money. The narrative has the steward correctly interpret the request, and reassure them they need not fear (v.23).

The appearance of עבדך\עבדך-אדני deference in response to accusations of crimes suits. The accusations represent Joseph's show of power over the brothers, thus deference is appropriate. However, deference is also mixed with first-person references. But there is a pattern. In 42:10-11 and 44:7-9, those responses in which reasons are given as to why the accusations are not true, עבדך-אדני deference is used in comments that frame each response and deal directly with the respective accusation. First-person is used in the centre of each response in association with reasons given to counter each accusation. This adds to the trend in biblical narrative, already noted in discussion for Judah, Jacob, the Tekoite woman, Abigail and David, that master-slave deference reduces when another politeness form is used. There is also the phenomenon of reduced deference in the responses when each accusation is repeated (42:13; 44:16). This may be ellipsis, or narrative abbreviation to avoid repetition.

#### 7.2.2.4. HUMANS INTERACTING WITH THE DIVINE

Humans interacting with the divine in Gen 12-50 takes two forms: dialogue (15; 17:1-22; 18:1-5; 19:2, 18-20; 20:3-7) and prayer proper (28:20-22; 32:10-12[9-11]). In both types of interaction, no one style of language predominates. עבדך-אדני deference is used in 18:1-5; 19:2, 18-20; and 32:10-13 [9-12]; אדני-אני deference in 18:23-32; and direct address in Abraham's responses to God's promises in 15:2-3, 8 and 17:17-18, except for the single use of אדני יהוה in 15:2. Similar is Abimelech to God in the dream dialogue of 20:3-7. Abimelech opens his turn with אדני but consistently uses the first person for the rest of his turn in the dialogue (20:4-5), though without the second person (direct address) for God. However, even in those prayers or turns in dialogues in which a character uses עבדך-אדני deference to God/angels, the deference is only partially used, being replaced by direct address for the most part. For Lot, עבדך-אדני deference only appears at the beginning of his turns in dialogue; for

<sup>38</sup> Noted by most commentators for 42:9 and 43:26.

Jacob, עבדך appears only once, and only in the context of a self-abasement statement ('I am not worthy of ... all ... you have shown to your servant'; 32:9[10]); and for Abraham, עבדך-אדני deference frames his offer of hospitality.<sup>39</sup> Politeness theory suggests that the increased use of the first person and direct address reflects an intimacy with God, arguing that an absence of politeness is used by friends/intimates. This is in contrast to the avoidance of intimacy between human characters. The same occurs in Psalms: most psalms use direct address to God and the first person for the voice in the psalm (see Chapter 8.2.1). Prayer, both in narrative and in Psalms, is further discussed in Chapter 8. To anticipate that discussion, the sense of intimacy is always present in prayer, no matter whether the prayer is a psalm or placed in a narrative. This raises the question whether requests to God should be treated as a separate category from requests to people.

The uses of עבדך-אדני deference correlate to context. It occurs in offers of hospitality (18:1-5; 19:2-4) and when a character feels his life is in danger (19:18-20; 32:10-13[9-12]). The offers of hospitality by Abraham and Lot are recognised to be very polite and generous, though it is often argued Lot is less polite and generous than Abraham.<sup>40</sup> This recognition of politeness is justified. In comparison with other biblical texts in which the intending host speaks to the visitor (Gen 24:31; Judg 13:15; 19:19; 1 Sam 28:21-22), Gen 18:1-5 and 19:2-4 are near unique in their use of master-slave deferential language by the host. It is used in 1 Sam 28:21-22, but only after the host has recognised her client to be her king. In Judg 19:19, which has a number of parallels with Gen 19:2-4 and its context,<sup>41</sup> it is the visitor who uses עבדיך for himself and his household. In Judg 13:15, Manoah uses no deference, despite being narrated as aware he has met a divine being. The texts together indicate that there is no fixed pattern for offers of hospitality, and thus what the assumed social status conventions were in ancient Israel for strangers needing hospitality. However, in comparison to the biblical texts noted

<sup>39</sup> The MT vocalises אדני in 18:3 as אֲדֹנָי, meaning 'my lords' plural (so Alter, *Genesis*, 77) or 'my Lord;' that is, an address to God (most commentators). Generally, it is argued that Abraham does not initially recognise YHWH, so the vocalisation should be אֲדֹנִי. For the contrary view, that Abraham did recognise YHWH in v.3, see Arnold, *Genesis*, 180; Mathews, *Genesis*, 217; and Waltke, *Genesis*, 267. Sarna, *Genesis*, 129, takes a middle position: Abraham does not recognise YHWH, yet recognises the three 'men' as 'no ordinary wayfarers.'

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g. Cotter, *Genesis*, 122; Speiser, *Genesis*, 143; Mathews, *Genesis*, 234; Waltke, *Genesis*, 273. Against this interpretation is that the angels arrived at *evening* (presumably near sunset), so it is impossible for Lot to spend the considerable time preparing a meal such as Abraham did: time is against him, and he cannot access his livestock due to the city gates being shut for the night. Only Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, recognises these potential problems, and thus what Lot offers and gives (which, like Abraham, is more than what is offered) is appropriate. Sarna, *Genesis*, 135, and Arnold, *Genesis*, 183, also accept that Lot is perfectly polite, given his circumstances.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 300.

above, the deferential language used by Abraham and Lot marks them as highly polite. This may be a literary device to indicate the importance of the visitors, though why this should be highlighted is a mystery, since in Genesis human-divine relationships are generally marked by direct speech.

Despite the reduction of deference as Abraham and Lot's offers of hospitality continue, other forms of polite language take its place, keeping their speeches in line with those of Jacob in Gen 33:4-16 and Judah and his brothers in chs 42-44. Abraham opens with אֲמֵנָה מִצְאָתִי הֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ ('Please, if I have found favour in your eyes'; 18:3), which represents the negative politeness strategy, 'question, hedge.'<sup>42</sup> By doing this, Abraham allows his hearer the freedom to accept or otherwise his offer without the loss of face. It also places the hearer in the role of the one with power, so also acts as a form of deference.<sup>43</sup> There is a high use of the particle נָא in the hedging statement; and with the jussives תַּעֲבֹר (v.3) and יִקַּח (v.4).<sup>44</sup> These uses of נָא represent conventional politeness, in keeping with Abraham's use of deference and obeisance (v.2), even if, as noted above, deference (not to mention bowing) is unusually polite for the context. The imperatives in vv.4-5 are in sequence with יִקַּח-נָא and וְאָקַח respectively, expressing purpose,<sup>45</sup> so are not impolite. Abraham's offer, וְאָקַח פֶּתִיל-לֶחֶם ('and I will take/bring a bit of food') is a classic understatement, given the narrative in vv.6-8, and universally recognised to be so. It is the negative politeness strategy, 'minimise the imposition', used to show the speaker does not coerce the hearer.<sup>46</sup> Those who interpret the intent of this part of Abraham's offer usually understand that Abraham indicates the ease which he can offer a lavish meal and it costs him little.<sup>47</sup> However, the imposition contained in the understatement is not what it costs Abraham, but potential embarrassment to his visitors for the lavishness of what he will give and the considerable length of time they will have to spend waiting for the meal to be prepared.<sup>48</sup> Lot in 19:2 uses the same politeness strategies with the exception of

<sup>42</sup> This is recognised by Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 278 ('if it is alright with you to accept my invitation ....'); and Speiser, *Genesis*, 129 ('if I may beg of you this favour'), followed by Reyburn and Fry, *Handbook*, 286.

<sup>43</sup> See fn.19 above.

<sup>44</sup> There is frequent discussion about the change from singular address in v.3 to plural address in vv.4-5 (which starts with the imperative וְרַחֲצוּ), best (and most simply) explained as Abraham moving from addressing the leader of the visitors to all three (see, e.g. Sarna, *Genesis*, 129, and Alter, *Genesis*, 77 [following Rabbinic tradition]; Speiser, *Genesis*, 129; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 46; Mathews, *Genesis*, 217; Waltke, *Genesis*, 267).

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 6.2.2.4 and fn.35.

<sup>46</sup> Speiser, *Genesis*, 131, recognises this strategy in his comment, '... the generosity of his [Abraham's] welcome is enhanced by his attempt to disparage his efforts' (my emphasis).

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Reyburn and Fry, *Handbook*, 387; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 278.

<sup>48</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 46, recognises the former: they will feel they have imposed on Abraham. Cotter, *Genesis*, 118, recognises the latter: 'Business is allowed to wait while the amenities are being served.'

hedging; that is, obeisance, deference, the use of נָא, and minimise the imposition.<sup>49</sup> Given that the visitors arrive at evening and so ‘need’ a place to stay the night, the face-threat that Lot addresses is that they might feel they are imposing on him.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, imposing on a host is what the Levite has to mitigate in Judg 19:19: the lack of offer of hospitality by the people of Gibeah (vv.15, 18) has forced him to request hospitality. Note not only the use of slave deference in v.19, but also the Levite’s claim he has full provisions for all humans and his donkey (‘minimise the imposition’), and that his request for hospitality is ‘off record’ (it is implied through his comment, *no one has taken us in*). In summary, Abraham and Lot’s respective politeness is designed to overcome any reticence the visitors may have in accepting their hospitality. In the case of Lot, this is shown by the narrator protracting the angels’ acceptance.

The second context for the use of עֲבָדְךָ-אֲדֹנִי deference is when characters feel their life is under threat (19:18-20; 32:10-13[9-12]). As with the offers of hospitality, the reduced deference as Lot and Jacob continue their speaking is covered by other politeness strategies. In Lot’s request that he be allowed to shelter in Zoar, and thus Zoar be spared from the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he opens with a similar hedging statement as Abraham did in his offer of hospitality (הִנֵּה-נָא מֵצָא עֲבָדְךָ הֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ (19:19; ‘[please] See! Your servant has found favour in your eyes’), he uses נָא frequently (twice with הִנֵּה), and he minimises the imposition by claiming that Zoar is ‘small’. The statement on having received favour is superfluous, given that Lot is experiencing favour at the time of speaking, but it has the implication, ‘as you have done for me up to now, do it again’. Jacob’s prayer in 32:10-13[9-12] is predominately reasons for the request for deliverance from Esau (stated in v.12a [v.11a]), but God is given titles in v.10 [v.9], and נָא is used with the imperative in the request proper (הַצִּילֵנִי נָא). Jacob also includes a statement of self-abasement, קִטַּנְתִּי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים (‘I am small [i.e. unworthy] of all the kindnesses and from all the truth which you did [i.e., have shown, given] [to/for] your servant’). As discussed in Chapter 5.3, self-abasement works in conjunction with deference to exaggerate the difference in

<sup>49</sup> A grammatical difference between Abraham and Lot is that Lot uses imperatives consistently when he addresses his visitors. This is, along with a reduced amount of what is offered and eventually given is used by commentators to contrast Lot with Abraham, as noted above. However, the presence of נָא-אֲדֹנִי and the first imperative being coupled with נָא (סֹרֵר נָא) indicates Lot is being perfectly polite, even though Christiansen ‘Linguistic,’ 291, argues that his politeness is marked. That is, it is to be noted as important.

<sup>50</sup> This might account for Lot’s so-called lesser politeness in comparison to Abraham: Lot deals with one face-threat; Abraham deals with two.

relative status between speaker and hearer. But in Jacob's prayer, in similar fashion to self-abasement in the Lachish letters and Joab's deference to David in 2 Sam 14:22 (Chapter 6.3.2.5), his self-abasement also is an expression of thanks that avoids being indebted to God.<sup>51</sup> Jacob uses both implications to press his logic of, 'As you have favoured me in the past, continue to favour me by delivering me from Esau.' This logic is the same as that used by Lot. The ultimate logic in the two prayers is, 'Don't let what you've done for me now be destroyed/undone.'

The two contexts of these interactions with the divine have עבדך-אדני deference used in different ways. In the context of a character fearing his life is under threat, עבדך-אדני deference is used lexically, with no thought given to the 'inferior status' association of slavery that the deference is based upon. Instead, Jacob and Lot use divine 'favour' to them as the key appeal for favourable responses to their requests. In this, Jacob and Lot's use of עבדך-אדני deference is similar to how עבדך\עבדיך-אדני deference is used between humans in Genesis. In the context of offers of hospitality, identity construction is taking place. Obviously, given the narration of who Abraham and Lot's visitors are, Abraham and Lot's use of עבדך-אדני deference could be put into their mouths by the narrator, since, as discussed above, other biblical offers of hospitality texts do not use this language to any extent. If so, then Abraham and Lot's deference continues the narrative description of their visitors as divine/heavenly. However, if Abraham and Lot's speaking can be considered to reflect something of Israelite custom, then their use of עבדך-אדני deference is deliberate:<sup>52</sup> to encourage their unknown hearers, who will be at the most social equals to them, to accept their hospitality. In this, the language relates to the association of slavery, 'work'. This is highlighted especially for Abraham, who is narrated as standing by his guests rather than eating with them (והוא-עמד עליהם תחת העץ ויאכלו; 18:8).

#### 7.2.2.5. OTHER SPEAKING/COMMUNICATION IN WHICH עבדך-אדני DEFERENCE OCCURS

The remaining speeches in Genesis in which עבדך\עבדיך-אדני deference occurs (32:5-6 [4-5]; 46:31-47:6; 50:15-18) relate to the speeches that have been just discussed. Jacob's message to Esau in 32:5-6 [4-5], recognised to be a literary equivalent of a standard form of epistolary

<sup>51</sup> A fuller discussion of self-abasement in the context of thanks is given in Appendix 1.1.

<sup>52</sup> C.f. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 23, 182: polite communication can be *motivated*, not just customary.

communication,<sup>53</sup> is intimately connected in purpose to his speaking once they met. The difference is that Jacob at this point in the narrative does not know how Esau will respond to his arrival. Despite discussion on the use of Jacob's language (see Section 7.2.2.1), his deference suits: Esau may wish to exercise revenge for the stolen blessing. That is, Jacob acknowledges Esau has power.<sup>54</sup> As with Abraham and Lot's offers of hospitality, and how Jacob will soon pray, most of Jacob's message is in direct address. As also in Abraham's offer of hospitality of 18:3-5, עבדך-אדני, deference frames the message. But, as in these other communication events, the reduced deference is balanced by other forms of politeness. Most of Jacob's message contains reasons for his request (his stay with Laban, his possessions); and his request, to find favour with Esau (למצא־חן בעיניך), is stated indirectly (ואשלחה להגיד; 'I have sent to tell my lord'). An indirect request, a negative politeness strategy, allows Esau freedom to both interpret it as a request and then act on it or otherwise. In similar fashion to Judah, Lot in 19:18-20, David (to Nabal) and Abigail, the request is left to last. The indirect request, along with Jacob's mention of his possessions, sets up the ambiguity on which 33:1-16 works. The role of the list of possessions in Jacob's reasons is not clear, because of Jacob's subsequent fear that Esau comes with hostile intent (has Jacob said too much?). Suggestions are made that the gift was meant to arouse Esau's interest (Hamilton), to assuage him (Arnold), or to impress him (Wenham).<sup>55</sup> In light of the subsequent narrative and what I have discussed in Section 7.2.2.1 for 33:1-16, these suggestions can be summarised as Jacob's purpose with the gift was 'to assure Esau that he is capable of buying a high priced peace with his brother'.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> This is noted by most commentators, but not always proved. John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East* (BJS169; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) 79-80, provides the necessary discussion and gives ANE parallels on pp. 45-76. For other parallels, see Knutson, 'Literary,' 205-207 (Ras Shamra), and Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 321 (Saqqara and Kuntillet 'Ajrud). The absence or partial absence of prescripts of letters embedded in narrative is discussed in Dennis Pardee, J. David Whitehead, Paul E. Dion, 'An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography', *JBL* 97 (1978) 323, 330-331; and Knutson, 'Literary,' 210, 213-214, commenting on 2 Kgs 5:6; 10:1-2 and 2 Sam 12:27-28. C.f. 1 Sam 25:6-8, discussed in Chapter 6.2.2.1.

<sup>54</sup> Some commentators argue that Esau is portrayed as a prince, which assists their argument that Jacob is cast in the role of a vassal (e.g. Alter, *Genesis*, 178). However, this should not be pressed too far. Abraham has already been portrayed as having 318 fighting men (Gen 14) and narrated as being called a 'prince' in chapter 23; Isaac has negotiated treaties as an equal with Abimelech in chapter 26; Jacob has just emerged from his dialogue with Laban as a recognised patriarch in his own right; and his list of possessions in 32:6[5] indicates he has considerable manpower with him. In narrative time, that manpower will be soon be used (implied) by his sons to sack the city of Shechem (chapter 34). Much later, Jacob will also bless Pharaoh (47:10), one of the most powerful kings of the time (see Section 7.3 below).

<sup>55</sup> Respectively, Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 321; Arnold, *Genesis*, 281; Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 290.

<sup>56</sup> Reayburn and Fry, *Handbook*, 750. John H. Walton, *Genesis* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 603-604 suggests that the list is Jacob saying that he will not claim anything of Esau's. This is certainly correct, but the subsequent narrative requires a more focussed suggestion.



The use of עבדיך deference by Jacob's sons to Pharaoh in 47:3-4 in their request to settle in Goshen parallels their previous deference to Joseph, though without any context of hostility. As noted in Section 7.2.2.2, they are foreigners and pastoralists, therefore low in social ranking, despite the position Joseph holds. Thus the deference suits, being based on the 'inferior status' association of slavery. By using deference, and the narrative having Joseph teach them what to say (46:33-34), they acknowledge Pharaoh's superiority over them and power to grant or otherwise their request. The request is formatted similarly as Abraham's offer of hospitality in 18:3-5 and Jacob's message to Esau (32:5-6[4-5]): master-slave deference frames their speaking and the reasons given and the request proper is in direct address. Variations from the other texts are: no prostration; no use of אדני; עבדיך is used in the reason; and the request is given twice, forming a frame along with עבדיך for their turn in the dialogue. The lack of narration of prostration and the absence of אדון can be explained as the narrator omitting such formalities.<sup>57</sup> Despite the conventionality of the brother's use of deference, the association, 'work' is evoked when Pharaoh directs Joseph<sup>58</sup> to assign any capable brothers to look after his livestock (47:6). That is, they will become servants/officials of the king. Metaphorical use of 'servant' thus translates into 'working' for the lord.

In Genesis 50:18b, Joseph's brothers offer themselves as עבדים to Joseph (לך עבדים) because they fear he will avenge their treatment of him now that their father is dead. It is difficult to ascertain whether 'slave' or 'servant' is intended in their offer, but given that they had previously offered themselves as slaves to Joseph in response to the 'theft' of the cup (44:16), the translation 'slave' suits. This is the only place in Genesis where associations with slavery (here, 'possession') are explicitly played upon, coming as it does on a purported speech by Jacob<sup>59</sup> in which the brothers are said to be עבדי אלהי אביך ('servants of the God of your father').<sup>60</sup> Since Joseph forgives them, what is intended in calling up associations with slavery is not stated. The suggestion that Joseph is God's surrogate is reasonable, helped by Joseph's

<sup>57</sup> See also Chapter 6.3.2.2 and fn.71.

<sup>58</sup> There is considerable debate as to the relationship, and origin, of 47:1-4 and vv.5-6. See the commentaries.

<sup>59</sup> The opinion by commentators is that Jacob's 'speech' is fabricated by the brothers; so Sarna, *Genesis*, 349; Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 703 (citing 2 Sam 15:8; 16:3 and 1 Kgs 1:17 as parallels); Waltke, *Genesis*, 621; Noble, 'Esau,' 239.

<sup>60</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 622, also recognises this connection between עבדים in v.17 and עבדי אלהי אביך in v.18.

denial of exactly that in v.19 (כי התחת אלהים אני).<sup>61</sup> No matter whether the brothers intended literal slavery, their offer as ‘slaves’ is that of self-abasement, in line with their obeisance, which as indicated earlier, exaggerates the relative status between them and Joseph. This relative status is only apparent; it is an identity construction to encourage Joseph to forgive them. Joseph’s forgiveness of them (vv.19-21) restores the familial relationship (they are all brothers), hinted in their designation of themselves as עבדי אלהי אביך. That is, the association in עבד, ‘possession’ (deserved because of their crime of selling Joseph), is played upon to assist with their plea of forgiveness. In the narrative, this incident serves to finalise the fulfilment of Joseph’s dreams (his brothers bow down once again; their ‘quote’ of Jacob also has him pleading with Joseph),<sup>62</sup> and narrates the confession of the brothers for their crimes against Joseph, something which was not done in ch 45.<sup>63</sup>

#### 7.2.2.6. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

The predominate context of Genesis in which characters use some measure of master-slave deference is when characters feel threatened in some way. Judah and his brothers faced accusations of spying and theft. After their father’s death, they fear Joseph will exact revenge. Jacob fears Esau. When they finally meet, Jacob’s deference and other polite strategies is for the purpose of getting Esau to forego revenge for the stolen blessing, and then to keep himself separate from his brother. These requests are large impositions,<sup>64</sup> and reflect Jacob’s fear that Esau may seek revenge at a later time. His prayer to God before that meeting indicates clearly that fear. Lot fears the loss of his life in the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and has already witnessed the angels’ power over him and others. Abraham and Lot’s offers of hospitality are an exception to this context. These are marked as excessively polite for what appears to be a common custom in the ancient Near East.<sup>65</sup> Jacob’s sons’ speaking to Pharaoh is also an exception. They are not narrated as being in fear of him. However, their deferential and other polite language suits the context in which they are portrayed: as foreigners and

<sup>61</sup> So Waltke, *Genesis*, 622-623, and Arnold, *Genesis*, 388, in the sense that the brothers recognise that Joseph controls their fate.

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Speiser, *Genesis*, 377; Alter, *Genesis*, 305.

<sup>63</sup> Noble, ‘Esau,’ 238-239. Even here, Noble indicates how the confession still has an element of being unsatisfactory: ‘it is long-delayed’ and only occurs because of the brothers’ fear of impending revenge.

<sup>64</sup> Here, ‘imposition’ is politeness theory’s technical term that covers requests. A request, by nature, is an ‘imposition’ in that a speaker is wanting the hearer to do something.

<sup>65</sup> Despite many commentators assuming this, only Mathews, *Genesis*, 217, gives proof of its extent, but citing biblical texts (Hebrew Bible and New Testament) only.

pastoralists. Their deference also suits the large imposition their request for settlement implies: the combination of Jacob's own people he gained in Paddam-Aram (30:43; 32:6[5]) along with those he inherited from Isaac<sup>66</sup> would mean a community of over 1000 people. It would also assist with an implied statement that they are not a political threat to Egypt.<sup>67</sup>

In all cases, master-slave deference occurs either at the beginning of a speech or turn in a dialogue, or as a frame. The bodies of most speeches are characterised by direct address, but this is coupled with a variety of other politeness strategies that assist with the request or point being made. Thus direct address is not impolite. When a request is formally stated, deference is not necessarily used in it, but if the request is left to last, which is frequent, then deference may be used in the request if the speech uses deference as a frame.<sup>68</sup> That is, the introductory use of master-slave deference in a character's speech or turn in a dialogue can be considered to cover the rest of the more direct address in the speaking. Generally, in the speeches that contain master-slave deference, any request or point being made is clearly stated. The exception is Jacob to Esau in chs 32-33, in which the ambiguity that is part of Jacob's communication reflects the ambiguity of the context. Joseph's brothers' request for Joseph to forgive them also has some ambiguity, on the basis of their use of עבדִּיךָ and helped by the reason used to support their request: a supposed request by the now-dead Jacob for Joseph to forgive them.

Deferential language is, on the whole, kept lexicalised. However, plays on associations with slavery occur in the Joseph narrative: 'work' (serving) and 'possession' (enslavement). The last use of עבד in Genesis, Joseph's brothers offering themselves (once again) as slaves to him, and after having just claimed they were 'servants' of their father's god is the strongest play on the terminology. Here, it should be interpreted as self-abasement, similar to Abigail's use of slave terms in 1 Sam 25:41. Metaphoricity of master-slave deference is also partially played on in Abraham's offer of hospitality in Gen 18:3-5, helped by the subsequent narrative's

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<sup>66</sup> As the narrative stands, a considerable number of people are involved. Abraham in Gen 14:14 had 318 fighting men capable of fighting. Add non-fighting men, wives, women servants and children, along with numerical increase in Isaac's time, one can only speculate at how many people Jacob inherited.

<sup>67</sup> C.f. Mathews, *Genesis*, 843; Wenham, *Genesis*, 445.

<sup>68</sup> This is in contrast to Judg-2 Kgs, in which according to E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 295, deferential language is not normally incorporated into a character's stated request. However, as my analysis of Abigail's speech in Chapter 6.2.2.4 shows, she is an exception (see 1 Sam 25:27, 28 and 31, in which requests are explicitly stated, all using master-slave deference).

portrayal of him in the role of a servant ('worker') serving his guests (vv.6-8). Consequently, the narrative indicates that deferential use of master-slave language is never far from the reality of servitude.

In all speeches in which master-slave deferential language is used, the deference serves to help effect what is requested or the point being made. The only exception is with Joseph's brothers as a group in chs 42-44, who are unable to counter successfully Joseph's accusations against them. Thus, in similar fashion to Abigail and the Tekoite woman, the 'slave' is the 'master' of the interaction.

### **7.2.3. Speeches and dialogues in which אֲנִי-אֲדֹנָי deference appears**

As noted in Section 7.2.1, there are dialogues/speeches in Genesis in which 'my lord-I/we' (אֲנִי-אֲדֹנָי) deference is used.

#### **7.2.3.1. ABRAHAM BARGAINING WITH YHWH OVER SODOM (18:23-33)**

A good example of אֲנִי-אֲדֹנָי deference in Genesis 12-50 is Abraham's bargaining with YHWH over the fate of Sodom (18:23-33). The dialogue takes the form of six rounds, each initiated by Abraham and YHWH giving a response. In Abraham's second and subsequent turns, he reduces yet again the number of righteous people to be the basis for sparing Sodom. The dialogue is the second part of an appearance by YHWH to Abraham (18:1) and follows the reiteration of the promise of a son through Sarah (vv.9-15). It is introduced by YHWH's self-talk (18:17-21) in which the key terms of the dialogue, justice (מִשְׁפָּט) and righteousness (צִדְקָה), appear. The self-talk is in two parts: an affirmation of Abraham (vv.17-19) and YHWH's intention to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah (vv.20-21). As the narrative proceeds, the latter part should be thought of as an implied statement that YHWH intends to destroy the city (proved by the dialogue happening<sup>69</sup> and the angel's message to Lot in 19:13 that Sodom will be destroyed). YHWH's affirmation of Abraham, along with the final comment, וְאִם-לֹא אֲדַעַה ('and if not, I will know'), permits Abraham to make his plea. In many

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<sup>69</sup> C.f. Cotter, *Genesis*, 121. Not only is this politeness, but it makes a good narrative technique.

respects, YHWH is polite to Abraham: 'intensify interest to H' (Chapter 2.3.2.1, Table 1) and being 'off-record', or at least indirect, about the intention to destroy the cities.

Abraham's bargaining is recognised as audacious yet very polite. However, it opens with direct language and criticism of YHWH. This is in contrast to his language and actions in his offer of hospitality in vv.2-5. The non-use of עבדך-אדני deference both in his opening and as he proceeds is also noteworthy, considering its use in 19:2; 32:10-12[9-11]; and in other prayers such as 1 Sam 23:10-12 and 2 Sam 7:18-29. However, as discussed for texts in Section 7.2.2, the reduction in deference is countered by other politeness strategies, which shows Abraham is, on the whole, very polite. There is some argument that, as the dialogue continues, Abraham becomes more hesitant and YHWH's reply more strained,<sup>70</sup> but this is not the case. The following analysis bears this out.

- Request #1 (vv.23-25): Direct address; criticism; *hedging* (suppose 50 people); request in the form of a *question*; *reasons*, including *third person deference* with title for God (השפט כל־הארץ).
- Request #2 (vv.27-28): *Apologise*, including אני-אדני *deference* and נא (הנה־נא הואלתי לדבר); *self-abasement* (ואנכי עפר ואפר); *hedging* (suppose 45 people); request in the form of a *question*.
- Request #3 (v.29): *Hedging* (suppose 40 people).
- Request #4 (v.30): *Apologise* x 2, including אני-אדני *deference* and נא (אלי־נא יחר); *hedging* (suppose 30 people).
- Request #5 (v.31): *Apologise*, including אני-אדני *deference* and נא (הנה־נא הואלתי לדבר); *hedging* (suppose 20 people).
- Request #6 (v.32): *Apologise* x 2, including אני-אדני *deference* and נא (אלי־נא יחר); *hedging* (suppose 10 people).
- God's responses: A sequence of לא אשחית בעבור..., לא אעשה אִם־אמצא..., ונשאתי אִם־אמצא..., לא אשחית בעבור..., לא אעשה אִם־אמצא..., לא אשחית בעבור...

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 51-53; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 70; and argued against by Arnold, *Genesis*, 183.

Abraham is most polite in his second request, least polite in his third request, and varies only his use of the strategy, 'apologise' in requests #4-6. His request-question is absent in requests #3-6. This absence can be explained as abbreviation of repetition in narrative (c.f. 42:13 and 44:16). The inclusion of *ואדברה אִי-הַפֶּעַם* in request #6 indicates it is Abraham's last request.<sup>71</sup> If Abraham was increasing in hesitancy, his use of polite forms would increase. Likewise, YHWH's responses show no pattern of increasing strain. The first response sets what is at stake (forgiving the cities) and so is narrated in full, with the rest simply being alternations of two forms of response. The repetition of *... לא אשהית בעבור* in YHWH's final response from the previous should also be thought of as effecting no increasing strain. It might be that *בעבור* ('for the sake of') implies more respect for the people of Sodom than *אם-אמצא* ('if I find').

In the flow of the narrative, Abraham's direct address to and criticism of YHWH in the first round of the dialogue works because YHWH has been respectful to him. That is, Abraham has been placed momentarily in the role of a superior.<sup>72</sup> This allows the basis of Abraham's bargaining to be revealed: is God just to destroy righteous people with the wicked?<sup>73</sup> Once Abraham uses the title *השפט כל-הארץ* ('judge of all the earth'), significant forms of politeness, such as apologising, self-abasement, and *אני-אדני* deference, appear in his next turn and continue throughout his side of the dialogue.<sup>74</sup> That is, Abraham returns to his usual 'obedient and pious' characterisation.<sup>75</sup> *אני-אדני* deference and self-abasement (*ואנכי עפר ואפר*)<sup>76</sup> show awareness of the power difference between himself and YHWH, with *ואנכי עפר ואפר* showing it is heightened awareness. As discussed for 44:18, 'apologising' grants the hearer the freedom to grant the request or not. The use of these politeness forms indicates Abraham's concern is not that God will not forgive the cities, but to reduce the number of righteous people as the basis of that forgiveness. This suggests that Abraham had other reasons for his

<sup>71</sup> Why Abraham stops at ten righteous people is debated. The interpretation that 'ten righteous people' represents the smallest unit of community seems to be favoured. See Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 292; Waltke, *Genesis*, 271; and Sarna, *Genesis*, 134.

<sup>72</sup> This interpretation assists in accepting the ancient versions' *YHWH stood before Abraham* against the MT's *יהוה עומד לפני יצחק* in v.22. It is generally argued that the MT changed the text because of the anthropomorphism in having God standing before Abraham as an official would to a king or a servant before a master (e.g. Gen 41:46; 2 Kgs 5:25), similar to what Abraham has been portrayed as doing in Gen 18:8.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g. Davidson, *Genesis*, 69; Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 291; c.f. Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 20.

<sup>74</sup> All commentators accept the MT's *אָדֹנָי* in the dialogue. This works in the narrative because of the prediction of Isaac's birth in vv.10-15, and the reintroduction of *יהוה* by the narrator in v.17.

<sup>75</sup> Alter, *Genesis*, 81. On p.82, Alter also recognises how Abraham employs 'a whole panoply of the abundant rhetorical devices ... for expressing self-abasement before a powerful figure.'

<sup>76</sup> The formula is rare, found elsewhere only in Job 42:6. For discussion, see Mathews, *Genesis*, 230, fn.434. The individual elements are used frequently and give the sense of what is intended by the use of the formula.

bargaining. That is, his request is ‘off-record.’ The subsequent narrative indicates what his request is: the rescue of Lot and his family; helped especially by the narrator’s authorial statement in 19:29, ויזכר אלהים את־אברהם וישלח את־לוט מתוך (‘God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out the midst ...’).<sup>77</sup>

### 7.2.3.2. THE HITTITES TO ABRAHAM IN THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A BURIAL GROUND FOR SARAH (23:3-16)

The Hittites’<sup>78</sup> negotiation with Abraham when he requests a burial site for Sarah (Gen 23:3-16) is a rare occasion in Genesis of deferential language (here, אנהנוֹ/אני-אדני deference) being used between the patriarchs and the inhabitants of the land. Generally, such interactions are always in direct address (see Section 7.3 below). In this case, it is the Hittites who use deference (vv.6, 11, 15). In all cases, it is used in a formula, ‘hear us/me,’ at the beginning of their turns in the dialogue followed by direct address. Each turn is a response to a yet more specific request Abraham makes. In their first turn, in contrast to Abraham’s statement that he is a foreigner (v.4), they also designate him as נשיא אלהים (‘prince of God’), thus the deference suits (v.6). Abraham, like the Hittites, also uses direct address, but despite doing so does not take the role of superior. This is shown by his use of politeness strategies such as self-abasement (גר־ותושב אנכי עמכם; ‘I am a stranger and sojourner with you’; v.4); bowing (vv. 7, 12); and hedging (אם־יִישׁ את־נפשכם; ‘if you are willing’; vv.7, 12). His self-abasement, however, recognises his technical status in the land (גר; ‘foreigner’), which explains the rest of his politeness. However, as noted, the Hittites elevate him by their use of אדני and נשיא אלהים, thus the rare situation of mutual deference between a patriarch and the inhabitants of

<sup>77</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, ‘Parataxis, Rhetorical Structure, and the Dialogue over Sodom in Genesis 18’, in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* (JSOTSS 257; eds, P.R. Davies, D.J.A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 141-145 arrives at the same conclusion on the basis that Gen 18-19 contains the literary technique, parataxis. ‘Parataxis’ is a style of writing in which detail, thoughts and motives are not expressed, ‘background’ is prominent, there is much narrative suspense, and so on. See Auerbach, *Mimesis* (trans., W.R. Trask; Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1974 [1953]) 3-23. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 291-293, also argues that the dialogue is not about forgiving Sodom, but on the basis that vv.17-32 is a later insertion to teach about God’s righteousness.

<sup>78</sup> It appears the Hittites, here a people who live near Mamre, are not related to the Hittites of Anatolia, unless the text incorporates an anachronism (c.f. ‘the Philistines’ in 21:22, 34; 26:1 – see Wenham *Genesis 16-50*, 94 for that discussion), which some scholarship will use to argue a late date. For discussion, see Mathews, *Genesis*, 316; and Harry A. Hoffner, *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973) 197-200.

the land. This situation is best explained as the language of negotiation,<sup>79</sup> as this is the first occurrence of Abraham acquiring land. The mutual deference indicates that the interactants have no power over each other, but social distance is high.<sup>80</sup> Thus, in keeping with the portrayal of the patriarchs and local peoples in Genesis, Abraham and the Hittites are equals.

### 7.2.3.3. THE EGYPTIANS TO JOSEPH DURING THE FAMINE (47:18-19)

The Egyptian people's use of אֲדֹנָי-אֲדֹנִי deference (Gen 47:18-19) in the narrative of Joseph giving grain during the famine (vv.13-26) contrasts to what is used in the Egyptian court in Gen 41. There, third-person is used when addressing Pharaoh (see Section 7.3 below). However, letters to the vizier show a sustained use of 'my lord-I' deference.<sup>81</sup> Given Joseph's role, the use of deference suits.<sup>82</sup>

However, the association of slavery, 'possession', latent in אֲדֹנִי in the people's speaking, is played upon in the narrative. The people twice give themselves as 'slaves to Pharaoh' (עֲבָדִים) (לְפָרֹעַ; vv.19, 25). In v.25 עֲבָדִים is juxtaposed neatly with אֲדֹנִי: אֲדֹנִי וְהִיָּינוּ עֲבָדִים (‘let us find favour in your eyes my lord, and let us become slaves to Pharaoh’).<sup>83</sup> That is, the deferential אֲדֹנִי for Joseph translates into servitude to Pharaoh, helped by Joseph buying them and their land (vv.18-21). It is unlikely that state slavery is meant, rather some form of serfdom or tenant farming system in which obligation to the state as owner of the land is represented by the 20% tax.<sup>84</sup> In effect, the use of עֲבָד for the Egyptian people evokes a

<sup>79</sup> Recognised by most commentators. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 129, indicates equivalent language continues into the present in the Middle East. The general opinion is that Abraham accepted a very high price for the field, despite the lack of comparative data for verification.

<sup>80</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 242.

<sup>81</sup> Edward Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (SBLWAW1; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990): #45-50a, 52, 54-58. 'My lord-I' deference also occurs in bodies of #117, 145, 307, 315.

<sup>82</sup> 41:41, 43, 44 and 45:8 suggest Joseph is a vizier. For discussion on Joseph's role, see Wenham, *Gen 16-50*, 595, and Walton, *Genesis*, 676-677.

<sup>83</sup> My translation shows the impf-perf verb sequence between the two verbs, with נִמְצָא interpreted as a first-person jussive and וְהִיָּינוּ continuing that mood. ET's, e.g. NRSV, normally translate וְהִיָּינוּ as having an outcome sense: '(and) we will become ....' Translating עֲבָדִים as 'slaves' follows the NRSV.

<sup>84</sup> As indicated in Chapter 3, most people in ancient Egypt were essentially unfree; that is, restricted to the land in some way. See Bakir, A.E.-M., *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (ASALE Supp 18; Cairo: De L'Institut Français D'Archéologie Orientale, 1952) 1-9. Because of the minimal epigraphic evidence that relates to land policy, describing the situation is problematic. Bakir prefers the term *praedial serfdom* to avoid connotations of mediaeval serfdom. Some commentators prefer the term 'tenant farming' (e.g. Mathews, *Genesis*, 859; Waltke, *Genesis*, 591), or 'indentured servitude' (Arnold, *Genesis*, 371). There is also general agreement that Gen 47 reflects Egyptian practice, but not of any one period. However, the closest parallels to Gen 47 are Mesopotamian texts that mention enslavement due to famine along with the gratitude of those enslaved for being kept alive. See Victor A. Hurowitz, 'Joseph's enslavement of the Egyptians (Genesis 47:13-26) in the Light of Famine Texts



number of associations of slavery: ‘debt/poverty’ and ‘oppression’ (the context that called forth serfdom), ‘work’, and ‘possession’ (the people have ‘sold’ themselves to Pharaoh).

#### 7.2.3.4. RACHEL TO LABAN (31:35)

Rachel’s use of אֲדֹנִי-אָדֹנִי deference to her father in Gen 31:35 contrasts to the normal direct address within the patriarchal family and between it and near relatives (see Section 7.3 below). It is particularly notable that her deference is in the context of deception: she uses menstruation as an excuse to hide her theft of Laban’s תְּרָפִים (31:19).<sup>85</sup> However, her deference may simply represent the enormity of the situation: she disobeys her father. It may also represent her siding with Jacob against her father, and having to refer to Laban deferentially as though he is a non-related male. However, since Sarah uses אֲדֹנִי for Abraham in 18:12, this latter idea is difficult to sustain, given that otherwise there is no other use of master-slave deference in the patriarchal families. But as the story is narrated, Rachel knows what she is doing: deceiving her father. As the narrative portrays the situation, it is difficult to determine if she heard Jacob’s statement that the thief, if found, was to be put to death (v.32). But, as ancient readers would know, the theft is a major crime, exploited in Gen 44 (see Section 7.2.2.2 above). It is reasonable to assume that she is right to fear her theft being discovered. Therefore, her use of deference can be correlated with her fear of discovery and its consequences. Her deference does not give her away because Laban would understand it simply as necessary in her request, or refusal, to comply with the requirements of his search due to menstruation.

But her statement is also similar to those speeches already discussed, especially those in which עַבְדְּךָ-אֲדֹנִי deference appears. אֲדֹנִי is only used in her introduction, and direct address used in the rest of her speech; but the direct address is balanced with other politeness strategies. Her request, to remain sitting (כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לָקוּם מִפְּנֶיךָ; ‘that I cannot rise before you’), is an indirect request (i.e. ‘be conventionally indirect’). She gives a reason (כִּי-יִדְרֹךְ נָשִׁים לִי; ‘for the way of women is upon me’). Her opening deferential statement (אַל-יִיחָר בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנִי; ‘let it not

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from Mesopotamia’, *RB* 101 (1994) 358, (cited in Arnold, *Genesis*, 371). The big question relating to Gen 47 is whether there was private ownership of land at anytime in Egypt.

<sup>85</sup> All commentators recognise that Rachel, by her act, has made her father’s *teraphim* unclean and therefore useless. However, it only holds true if Rachel was genuinely menstruating (not stated by the narrator), and if readers viewed menstrual blood as impure, as codified in Lev 15:16-24. Did other ancient Near Eastern peoples also view menstrual blood as impure?

kindle [i.e. be angry] in the sight of my lord') addresses the face-threat to Laban—her uncooperativeness—and is the negative politeness strategy, 'apologise,' used also by Judah, the Tekoite woman and Abigail. By using these politeness forms, she recognises Laban's power over her as her father, a power Jacob will shortly dispute (v.41 – he has paid the bride-price for her and Leah, thus Laban has no control over them). Thus, like the Tekoite woman in 2 Sam 14, she uses deference and polite language to deceive. But in keeping with the Tekoite woman and the other texts studied so far, she as 'slave' is the 'master' of the situation: she gets what she wanted.<sup>86</sup>

### 7.2.3.5. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

The use of אֲנַחְנוּ־אֲנִי־אֲדֹנָי deference in Genesis cannot be correlated to context, unlike for עֲבָדְךָ־עֲבָדֶיךָ־אֲדֹנָי deference. For Abraham's bargaining with God in 18:22-33, deference is reduced to אֲנִי־אֲדֹנָי from עֲבָדְךָ־אֲדֹנָי because Abraham's concern is not fear for himself but fear for Lot and his family. Despite the audacity of his bargaining, Abraham is portrayed in keeping with his other interactions with God (direct address), and he uses a number of politeness strategies as rhetoric to assist his bargaining. In similar fashion to his and Lot's offers of hospitality, and Jacob and Lot's prayers, his side of the dialogue indicates that politeness should not be measured by the use of deference alone. As it is, in keeping with all uses of deference studied so far, Abraham gets what he wants: Lot's rescue.

The Hittites' and the Egyptian people's use of אֲנַחְנוּ־אֲדֹנָי deference represents an increased use of deference from what is normally portrayed in Genesis in the interactions between the patriarchs and local peoples, and Egyptians amongst themselves. For the Hittites, however, their deference is matched by Abraham's politeness to them, and so they and Abraham in effect remain as equals. Their polite language is to be understood as the language of bargaining. It is difficult to know who came off best in the negotiations, but their use of 'lord' to Abraham results in what may be a high price for the burial field. In contrast to the Hittites, the Egyptian people's use of אֲנַחְנוּ־אֲדֹנָי deference is to be interpreted as being conventional for its setting. However, Genesis' portrayal of them is ironic. They get what they want with their use of אֲדֹנָי: servitude to Pharaoh and the loss of ownership of their land. Thus, as for Abraham

<sup>86</sup> As noted frequently now, only David (in 1 Sam 25:6-8) and Joseph's brothers as a group (Gen 42-44) fail to get what they want by using deference (and other polite language).

and Lot's offers of hospitality and Joseph's brothers' coupling of master-slave deference with offers of enslavement for punishment for their real and apparent crimes, master-slave deference is never far from associations with chattel slavery.

#### 7.2.4. **Summary of texts in Genesis that use master-slave deference in any form**

The use of either עבדך-אדני or אנהנו-אדני deference assists the one speaking to get what s/he wants. In similar fashion to master-slave deference, אנהנו-אדני deference serves to introduce a character's speaking. However, since all three contexts in which אנהנו-אדני deference appears are dialogues rather than a single speech or prayer (for the situations in which full master-slave deference occurs, only Jacob's meeting with Esau is a true dialogue), it makes the occurrence of אנהנו-אדני deference noticeably present, introducing most turns of a character's speaking.

For speaking events in which both forms of deference occur, the majority of the speaking is in direct address. But this is matched with an increased use of other politeness strategies. Thus, the characters remain polite and it is no wonder that they get their request. There are occasions in which the latent associations with slavery are played upon, most notably Joseph's brothers' offer of themselves as עבדים to Joseph (twice: 44:16; 50:18), and the Egyptians' offer of themselves as עבדים to Pharaoh (47:19, 25). The offers of hospitality by Abraham and Lot (18:3-5; 19:2) also have these wealthy heads of their large households cast in the role of servants.

The use of עבדך-אדני deference is found in only three contexts. The first is when characters fear death or face some other significant threat against them, especially by the hearer. The second is when offers of hospitality are made. The third is Jacob's sons dealing with Egyptian leaders. The first context creates an understandable reason for deference and other polite language: requests for sparing of one's life or negotiating punishment can be considered as large impositions.<sup>87</sup> The context of offering hospitality is unusual, since other biblical texts do not have characters employ that level of deference. Thus Abraham and Lot are marked as unusually polite in this regard. Jacob's sons' use of deference to either Joseph or Pharaoh reflects their foreign and pastoral status (that is, low social standing in Egypt) but when they

<sup>87</sup> For the meaning of 'imposition', see fn.63 above.

use it to Joseph, it is also done out of fear of him (the second context). The use of אֲנִי-אֲדֹנִי deference has no one clear context or contexts for its use. This suggests, as I have done in chapters 5 and 6, that it is the more common form of deference for ancient Israelites, even though there are more occasions in Genesis in which master-slave deference is used than אֲנִי-אֲדֹנִי deference. That is, עַבְדְּךָ-אֲדֹנִי is marked as the more polite form of address.

### **7.3. NON-MASTER-SLAVE LANGUAGE IN GENESIS 12-50**

Genesis also includes some significant speeches, prayers and dialogues in which master-slave deference is used in a lesser way, or is absent. All interactions within the patriarchal family and their near kin (including Abraham's servant's request for a wife for Isaac [24:34-39, 54-59]) are characterised by the sole use of direct address ('I-you'). Exceptions occur in 31:35 (Rachel to Laban; discussed above) and 18:12 (Sarah's self-talk about Abraham). All interactions by the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) with others outside of the family (14:21-24; 20:9-13; 21:22-24; 26:26-29) are also characterised by the use of direct address. This includes Jacob's sons' interactions with the Shechemites in chapter 34 and Jacob to Pharaoh in 47:7-10. The portrayal of the Egyptian court also has an absence of master-slave deference when both the cupbearer (41:9-13) and Joseph (pre- and post-promotion: 41:25-36; 47:1) speak to Pharaoh.

In many respects, the absence of deference between members of the patriarchal family to each other and their near kin is to be expected. Politeness theory argues that politeness is not needed by social intimates, which can include family. The portrayal of interactions within the patriarchal family fits this—direct address between members, both by men and women<sup>88</sup>—despite evidence in Genesis of patriarchal culture.<sup>89</sup> It is also the case in the wider ancient Near East. Hittite and Egyptian New Kingdom period letters, for example, contain direct language between family members. This also occurs when the familial terms, 'brother' and 'sister', are used metaphorically for equals, allowing for the view that these terms are used for

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<sup>88</sup> For women to men, see 16:5; 21:8; 30:1; 31:14-16. In 24:58, Rebekah is given the right to decide whether to leave her family to be Isaac's wife after half a day's notice or delay her travel a few days.

<sup>89</sup> Sarah and Rachel's respective uses of אֲדֹנִי are clear examples (18:12; 31:25). Others are: Lot's proposed treatment of his daughters (19:8); the men of the family controlling whom their daughters/sisters married (ch 24; 29:15-30; the principle at stake in ch 34); and Abraham having the final decision over Hagar and Ishmael (16:5-6; 21:10-14).

social equals.<sup>90</sup> Thus politeness theory's contention about lack of politeness between social intimates is borne out as applicable to ancient Near Eastern letters as well as the Bible.

Some interactions have narrative purposes. Jacob's interactions with Laban in chapters 29-31 portray Laban as 'cunning, deceptive, heartless, greedy, and ambitious.'<sup>91</sup> Laban is presented more positively in ch 24, reflected in Abraham's servant's initial speech, which uses some politeness strategies. The request is left to last (24:49; compare Judah, Lot, David and Abigail) and the rest of the speech (24:34-48) is a lengthy reason for the request. Yet, the real request, that Rebekah be Isaac's wife, is indirectly made ('be conventionally indirect'), indicated in vv.37 and 48. The request in v.49 is essentially a question, 'What will you do now, given what I've told you?'

The portrayal of the patriarchs with other peoples outside the family, with both sides using direct address to each other (14:21-24; 20:9-13; 21:22-24; 26:26-29), suggests they are portrayed as equals. This is also the case with Jacob's sons and the Shechemites (ch 34) and Jacob and Pharaoh (47:7-10). The exception, the Hittites' use of deference to Abraham (ch 23) and his bowing and use of politeness in return, was explained in Section 7.2.3.2 as the language of negotiation. But such language does not occur in Jacob's sons' negotiations with the men of Shechem (34:8-17) and Isaac's negotiation with Abimelech of Gerar (26:26-29), both of which occur in the context of hostility. Jacob's interaction with Pharaoh occasions considerable comment, especially his blessing of Pharaoh, which portrays him as superior to Pharaoh. This is unusual as it would be expected that Jacob use deference because of his foreign status and connection with the request of his sons for a place to stay during the

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<sup>90</sup> For Egyptian letters, see Wente, *Letters*, e.g. #116, 120, 123, 124, 139, 171. Direct address is also used in letters addressed to recipients designated as 'father' (e.g. #147, 158, 167, 181), but as is discussed below, this also can reflect an apparent culture in Egypt during the New Kingdom of directness between social inferiors and superiors. For Hittite letters, see Hoffner, *Letters*, 58-59, for general comments, and for examples, #56b, 59-61b, 66-67, 69-70, 72, 73b, 75b, 80b-82. In some letters, the honorific, 'my dear brother' is also used in the body along with direct address. In contrast, letters to a superior or the king frequently employ the honorific 'my lord' and 'your majesty, my/our lord,' even if second-person address is used in the body. See, e.g. #48-54, 88-89, 111-113, 118-119. The letters from the great kings in the Amarna corpus (EA 1-44) also frequently use direct address to the king of Egypt. See William L. Moran (ed., trans.), *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992) for the texts. However, in Ugaritic language letters from Ugarit, the presence of prostration formulae in letters addressed to a 'brother' indicates that in Ugarit, 'brother' relationships were not necessarily equal (Hawley, *Studies*, 231).

<sup>91</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 404. C.f. Mark E. Biddle, 'Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization', *JBL* 121 (2002) 617-638 631: 'a swindler, a manipulative and deceitful master,' said in connection with intertextuality between Gen 29-31 and 1 Sam 17-31, and especially between David and Nabal, to argue that 1 Samuel portrays Saul and Nabal acting similarly toward David.

famine. His long life, 130 years at this point in the narrative, is usually given as the reason for his apparent superiority.<sup>92</sup> An alternative view is that Jacob's blessing is in line with the patriarchs as bringing blessing to the nations.<sup>93</sup> However, it is Joseph who has this role in chs 37-47. Certainly Jacob's interaction with Pharaoh is portrayed as in keeping with that of the patriarchs with outsiders—as equals<sup>94</sup>—but his blessing of Pharaoh has Pharaoh, the god-king, in a situation of recognising a greater power over him and his gods. That is, the narrator conveys God's sovereignty over Egypt and its king.<sup>95</sup>

As noted in Section 7.2.3.3 above, Genesis' portrayal of interactions in the Egyptian court (ch 41) has officials and other social inferiors (here, Joseph) use the third-person when addressing Pharaoh and the first-person for themselves. Third-person deference dissociates Pharaoh from any face-threat in what the speakers say, but it also keeps the relationship between speaker and Pharaoh distant despite the use of the first-person (Chapter 2.3.2.1, Table 1). In contrast to the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of the Israelite, Aramean, Babylonian and Persian courts, the absence of master-slave deference to Pharaoh is unusual. Inscriptions from the Amarna period show that high officials used 'servant' in their titles. In the New Kingdom period, prescripts of letters sent to social superiors (the king, an official, or higher official) also show that the senders called the recipient 'lord' and themselves 'your servant, though in most cases the sender and addressee's official titles (which could be elaborate) are used.'<sup>96</sup> There is also a culture of 'my lord-I' deference, especially evident in letters sent to the vizier, noted in Section 7.2.3.3. However, in the body of many letters to a social superior, direct address is

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g. Arnold, *Genesis*, 370-371; Waltke, *Genesis*, 587; Mathews, *Genesis*, 846; implied in Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 170. These commentators argue that Egyptians viewed 110 years as the ideal lifespan. Commentators who employ source criticism understand Gen 47:7-12 to be a P text (e.g. Skinner, *Genesis*, 498; Wenham, *Genesis*, 440; Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 170-171; Speiser, *Genesis*, 352-353).

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 446, 451; Mathews, *Genesis*, 846; c.f. Skinner, *Genesis*, 498.

<sup>94</sup> Recognised by Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 170-171; and Cotter, *Genesis*, 322: 'one head of family to another'.

<sup>95</sup> This is a second time Pharaoh has been confronted with a greater power than himself or his gods. Most commentators recognise that Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream and advice in 41:16, 25-36 carries polemic, especially with Joseph's insistence that God is sovereign over the land of Egypt and that his interpretative abilities are directly from God. See, e.g. Wenham, *Gen 16-50*, 392; Hartley, *Genesis*, 327; Hughes, *Genesis*, 480; Mathews, *Genesis*, 740, 759-760; Cotter, *Genesis*, 322.

<sup>96</sup> For inscriptions, see William J. Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt* (SBLWAW 5; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 36, 119-120, 123, 145-146, 151, 172-177, 180-182, 191-198. Employees are also designated as 'servants' (pp.236-237), and occasionally a local official is called 'lord' by lower status people (p.44). For New Kingdom period letters, see Wentz, *Letters: #17, 22-30 [to the king or other royalty]; #45-50a, 52, 54-58 [to the vizier]; #111, 117, 128, 137, 142, 144, 145, 150, 155, 157, 307, 315, 318.*

used.<sup>97</sup> Thus Genesis may reflect Egyptian custom, with the absence of protocol simply being omitted in the narrative, which tends to be the case at least for the reporting of letters in biblical narrative.<sup>98</sup>

To summarise, the absence of deferential language in Genesis is found in contexts that politeness theory predicts it should be absent: within the patriarchal family because of their intimacy with each other; and between the patriarchal family and other peoples in Canaan because of the portrayal of them as equals to each other. The absence of deferential language within the Egyptian court can be explained as reflecting a New Kingdom period culture of inferiors using direct address to their social and formal superiors.

#### 7.4. CONCLUSIONS

The two forms of deference, master-slave (עבדך\עבדך-אדני) and ‘my lord-I’ (אנחנו\אני-אדני), add to the politeness of characters in the narratives of Genesis. They present the speaker as inferior to the hearer, which is usually the case. However, except for Joseph’s brothers as a group in chs 42-44, the speaker gets what he/she wants, and thus the ‘slave’ is the ‘master’ of the situation. This is similar to what occurs for the Tekoite woman and Abigail in 1-2 Samuel.

The use of עבדך\עבדך-אדני deference is found in only three contexts. The first is when characters fear death or face some other significant threat against them. A request for survival, or for the averting or modifying something unpleasant that will happen, is understandably a large imposition on the hearer (here, for a large benefit for the speaker), so deference suits. The second context, offering hospitality, is unusual. In comparison to other biblical texts, Abraham and Lot are marked as unusually polite in this regard. The third context, Jacob’s sons to Pharaoh, reflects their foreign and pastoral status. The use of אני-אדני deference has no

<sup>97</sup> Wente, *Letters*, #111, 128, 137, 142, 144, 150, 155, 318. See also W.F Albright, ‘A Case of Lèse-majesté in Pre-Israelite Lachish, with some Remarks’ on the Israelite Conquest’, *BASOR* 87 (1942) 32-38, who translates and discusses an Amarna period letter, written by an Egyptian official, Pa’apu who was stationed at Lachish to a superior. A noteworthy feature of this letter is the absence of master-slave deference, even in the prescript.

<sup>98</sup> See Section 7.2.2.5, fn.53 above on this phenomenon. Such an understanding presupposes that the literary text, Genesis, reflects non-literary custom, which itself, however, is the product of educated elites and their officials. A parallel occurs with reports of letters in biblical narrative (e.g. prescripts partially or not included). For discussion, see Dennis Pardee, J. David Whitehead, Paul E. Dion, ‘An Overview of Ancient Hebrew Epistolography’, *JBL* 97 (1978) 323, 330-331; and Knutson, ‘Literary,’ 210, 213-214, commenting on 2 Kgs 5:6; 10:1-2; and 2 Sam 12:27-28. C.f. Gen 32:5-6[4-5] and 1 Sam 25:6-8, discussed in Section 7.2.2.5 and Chapter 6.2.2.1 respectively.

one clear context or contexts for its use. This suggests it is the more common form of deference for ancient Israelites, as already noted above in Chapters 5 and 6.

In all cases of speaking in which either form of deference appears, the deference introduces the speech or turn in a dialogue, with the rest of the speech or turn being narrated as occurring in direct address. Sometimes deference will occur at the end of the speech or turn to provide a frame. Thus master-slave deference in any form is a politeness strategy. However, direct address used in the rest of each speech or turn in a dialogue is not necessarily impolite. In most cases, it is matched with a number of other politeness strategies which have the effect of increasing the persuasiveness of the speaker/s. Many of these strategies also add to the deference: they indicate that the hearer has some power over the speaker. The presence of direct address amongst the members of the patriarchal family and their kin, between the patriarch and local peoples, and in Pharaoh's court, serves to indicate that direct address is common and expected and thus highlights the politeness of characters that use deference in those contexts. It is also noteworthy that the interactions within the patriarchal family and between the patriarchal family and others also contain few other politeness strategies. This, according to politeness theory, suggests members of the family are truly intimate with each other despite the presence of patriarchy, and that the patriarchal family was considered by the narrator as an equal to other peoples in the land of Canaan.

Generally, the use of politeness strategies in Genesis is similar to that used by David and Abigail in 1 Sam 25 and the Tekoite woman in 2 Sam 14 (e.g. requests often left to last, the use of indirect or 'off-record' requests, affirming the hearer in some way, apologising). However, master-slave deference is used more in 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14 than in Genesis, except for Judah's plea. This increased use of deference in 1-2 Samuel, and in other books,<sup>99</sup> in comparison to Genesis also hides the pattern found in Genesis of deference opening or framing a speech or turn in a dialogue. The increased use also makes apparent that the use of 'your servant' by a speaker is a circumlocution for 'I', which is discussed at length in Chapter 8.2.1 for Psalms.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See 1 Sam 23:9-12; 24:8-15; 26:18-20; 2 Sam 19:18b-20; and 1 Kgs 18:7-15. Examples in 1-2 Sam in which deference is used more so than in Genesis are 1 Sam 1:11; 20:9-12; 2 Sam 7:18-29 (prayer); and 2 Sam 19:18b-38 (speeches). For other examples of speaking in which the stated request is last, see fn.27 above.

<sup>100</sup> C.f. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 179.



A comparison of both the use and non-use of master-slave deferential language in Genesis with mid-to-late second millennium BCE letter writing (Hittite, Ugaritic, Amarna [Canaanite vassals to Egypt] and Egyptian) shows that both the use of deference, and the settings in which it is not used, reflect the culture of ancient Near Eastern communication.

The use of deference in Genesis, along with what has been shown for 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14, and correlation with the wider ancient Near East, contrasts strongly with how it is used in the Lachish letters. As shown in Chapter 5.3, the senders use master-slave deference consistently, except when they are emotional about something. This suggests the senders of the Lachish letters are more polite than their ancient Near Eastern peers, with the exception of the vassal letters in the Amarna corpus. The other corpora (except for the Amarna vassal letters) tend to have deference mostly in prescripts; the Lachish letters have deference frequently in the bodies. Deference in Genesis and in 1-2 Samuel is used mostly in contexts of big impositions or face-threats to the hearer; deference in the Lachish letters is used for routine reporting. Direct address is used as a matter of course in both biblical narrative and other ancient Near Eastern letters; it is only used in the Lachish letters when the senders get emotional. Thus, my comment in Chapter 5.3, that the Lachish letters are ‘politer’ than both other ancient Near Eastern letters and most characters in biblical texts, is now confirmed. It seems that the relationship between Ya’osh and his subordinates remained stratified, though his subordinates had the freedom to criticise and offer suggestions.

Occasionally in Genesis 12-50 the associations with slavery that are latent in master-slave deference is played upon. Joseph’s brothers’ deference to Joseph nearly turns into enslavement (‘possession’), deference in offers of hospitality turns into waiting upon guests (‘work’), and the Egyptian people’s deference to Joseph turns into servitude to Pharaoh (‘work’, ‘debt/poverty’, ‘oppression’, ‘possession’). This is in contrast to Abigail and the Tekoite woman, of whom the former plays on the metaphoricity to express thanks, and the latter keeps the language lexicalised.



## CHAPTER 8

### THE USE OF עֶבֶד IN PSALMS AND OTHER PRAYER

#### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

So far, my analysis of the ‘metaphoric’ use of slave terms has dealt solely with narrative texts, with the exception of the Lachish letters, and focused on the deferential use of that language. As has been discussed, metaphoricity of the language has ranged from lexicalised (Tekoite woman in 2 Sam 14) to calling up images of servitude (the Egyptian people to Joseph in Gen 47; Abraham as a table server in Gen 18) to the social inferiority associated with slavery (Abigail in 1 Sam 25:41).

This chapter considers the metaphoric use of slave terms in poetry/wisdom literature, and in prayers recorded in narrative texts that have not up to now been discussed. Psalms will be the focus, since the few uses of slave terms in the other poetry/wisdom books simply designate servants and slaves, and once for courtiers (Prov 14:35). These uses have been listed in Chapter 4, and discussed when relevant in Chapters 5-7 and 9.

The majority of uses of slave terms in Psalms are for deference. Thus my discussion will, like for what has been done with narrative texts, focus on deference. However, the focus will broaden to include the use of עֶבֶד to designate servants, the king, other significant individuals and Israel as a whole. עֶבֶד is also used once for the created world (119:91). Some of these other uses of עֶבֶד, especially for David, impinge on its use in deference, as discussed in Section 8.2.4.

It is found that the use of עֶבֶד in deference toward God in Psalms is similar to the use of master-slave deference in characters’ speaking in narrative, but there are some differences. One is that אֲדֹנִי is rarely used for God in conjunction with עֶבֶד (found only in Ps 86), being replaced with YHWH. A second is that עֶבֶד in deference is relatively infrequent, and when used is limited to just a few contexts. Despite the frequent assertion in scholarship that עֶבֶד is a term connected with the king, it is found that this is not the case. עֶבֶד, despite its infrequent use, is a term applicable to anyone who wishes to pray to God.

The end of the chapter (Section 8.3) broadens the focus to include prayers found outside of Psalms. Those in Genesis have already been discussed (Chapter 7). It will be found that most uses of slave terms in deference in these prayers matches those uses found in Psalms: it is sometimes used, and it is sometimes not or infrequently used.

## 8.2. עֲבַד IN PSALMS

### 8.2.1. The uses of עֲבַד in Psalms

Section 8.2.1 is the text (with a few minor typographical corrections) of a paper that has been published as Edward J. Bridge, ‘Loyalty, Dependency and Status with YHWH: the use of ‘*bd* in the Psalms’, *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009) 360-378. The paper was written early in my candidature, so does not use politeness theory as part of its analysis, and I had not fully developed the aspects of metaphor theory that I have used elsewhere in this thesis. As a corollary, the use of ‘metaphoric’ to describe the major use of עֲבַד in Psalms is broader than what is used elsewhere in the thesis; and terms such as ‘sense of’ and ‘idea of’ should be translated as ‘association(s) evoked’. Updating is made in Section 8.2.2.2.

## LOYALTY, DEPENDENCY AND STATUS WITH YHWH: THE USE OF ‘BD IN THE PSALMS

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The term עֲבַד can have a variety of metaphorical meanings in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> One commonly noted metaphorical meaning is ‘worship’: as a verb, ‘to worship’<sup>2</sup>; and as a noun, ‘worshipper’ (e.g. for individuals). This meaning occurs frequently in Psalms (e.g. Pss 27:9; 79:2; 105:15[14];<sup>3</sup> 116:16; 119 *passim*).<sup>4</sup> However, little study has been done in the context of

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<sup>1</sup> F. Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, W. Gesenius, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, 1979 [1907]), pp. 712-715; W. Zimmerli, J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (SBT; transs. H. Knight, J. Jeremias and others; London, 1965), pp. 11-36. C.f. W.C. Kaiser, “עֲבַד (‘*abad*), work, serve”, in R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke (eds), *TWOT* (Chicago, 1980), p. 639; and Haas, C.H., “Slave, Slavery”, in T.D. Alexander, D.W. Baker (eds), *DTOP* (Leicester, 2003), p. 779.

<sup>2</sup> Noted by C.C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBC; Peabody, 1999), p. 386; c.f. p.393.

<sup>3</sup> All references will follow the Masoretic Text. Where the English text differs, this will be noted with square brackets.

the use of עֶבֶד in Psalms. As a result, meanings for the term are determined that do not adequately reflect the context of use. For example, the lexica simply list references that they best understand to match a meaning. Zimmerli and Jeremias inadequately refer to Psalms in their study on עֶבֶד. Goldingay in his commentary determines a meaning for עֶבֶד in Ps 86:2-4 and then applies that meaning when the term appears in other psalms.<sup>5</sup> Another result is that nuances of meanings for the term that arise from the context of use are missed. For example, only occasionally do scholars comment that עֶבֶד is found in the context of supplication and so could take on the meaning, ‘supplicant’ (e.g. 143:11-12; also Ex 4:10; Num 11:11; Dt 3:24).<sup>6</sup>

This study seeks to redress this lack of study of עֶבֶד in Psalms by studying all metaphorical uses of עֶבֶד, with a focus on the context of each use of the term. Both verb and noun forms will be covered. For the former, the subject and object will be covered and from that, how the verb is used. For the latter, the study will cover whether the term is used in the singular or plural, applied to named people, other people or things, Israel or to the speaking voice in the psalm; and the speaking context.

The noun form of עֶבֶד appears 56 times in Psalms: 18:1[ET: title]; 19:12 [11], 14[13]; 27:9; 31:17[16]; 34:23[22]; 35:27; 36:1[ET: title]; 69:18[17]; 69:37[36]; 78:70; 79:02, 10; 86:2, 4, 16; 89:4[3], 21[20], 40[39], 51[50]; 90:13, 16; 102:15[14], 29[28]; 105:6, 17, 25, 26, 42; 109:28; 113:1; 116:16; 119:17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 91, 122, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176; 123:2; 132:10; 134:1; 135, 9, 14; 136:22; 143:2, 12; 144:10. The verb form appears eight times in Psalms: 2:11; 18:44[43]; 22:32[31]; 72:11; 97:7; 100:2; 102:23[22]; 106:36.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For lexical and dictionary type articles, see, e.g. Brown et al, pp. 714; Zimmerli and Jeremias, pp. 15, 18; Haas, 779; Kaiser, 639; K.H. Rengstorff, “Δοῦλος, κτλ”, in G. Kittel (ed.), *TDNT Vol. 2* (trans., G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, 1964), pp. 261-280.

Many other scholars also note this meaning for עֶבֶד: see, e.g. M.J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (NSBT; Leicester, 1999), p. 173 (following Zimmerli and Jeremias); B.G. Wright, “Ebed/Doulos: Terms and Social Status in the Meeting of Hebrew Biblical and Hellenistic Roman Culture”, *Semeia* 83/84 (1998), p. 86; D.E. Callender Jr., “Servants of God(s), and Servants of Kings in Israel and the Ancient Near East”, *Semeia* 83/84 (1998), p. 73; S. Schultz, *Gott ist kein Sklavenhalter, Die Geschichte einer verspäteten Revolution* (Zürich and Hamburg, 1972), cited in M. Barth, H. Blanke, *The Letter to Philemon* ECC (Grand Rapids, 2000), p. 69, fn. 193; A.A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (NCBC; London, 1972), p. 286.

<sup>5</sup> Zimmerli and Jeremias, 15-19; J. Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 42-89* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids, 2007), pp. 619-621, 513, 521, 662, 689.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Jeremias and Zimmerli, p. 16; c.f. Harris, p. 174; Kaiser, p. 639.

<sup>7</sup> L. Lisowsky (ed.), *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, 1958), pp. 1009-1018; S. Mandelkern, et al., *Concordance on the Bible* (New York, 1955), pp. 809-815.

*LITERAL USE OF עָבַד IN PSALMS*

In Psalms, all uses of עָבַד are metaphoric, except for Pss 105:17 and 123:2.<sup>8</sup> In Ps 105:17, as part of a review of Israel's history, Joseph is mentioned as having been sold as a slave. In Ps 123:2, the practice of slaves watching for their master or mistress' hand signals is used as an illustration for the plural speaking voice in the psalm. Yet the illustration is itself a metaphor (technically, a simile). Even though the imagery of slaves trained to watch for the smallest gesture that means some task to do reflects 'the object dependency of the slave to his master',<sup>9</sup> the psalmist uses it for a positive image of trust that YHWH will intervene in a bad situation (vv.3-4).<sup>10</sup> The master and mistress' *hand* in v.2 has become a hand of benefaction,<sup>11</sup> of graciousness. However, עָבַד still connotes loyalty and submission to YHWH<sup>12</sup>: the worshippers have to 'watch' YHWH intently and wait for YHWH to be gracious to them. This metaphoric use of the illustration in Ps 123:2 encapsulates much of the metaphoric use of עָבַד in Psalms: it is often a term of deference to YHWH and implies loyalty to him, yet at the same time, trust in YHWH is also implied.

*METAPHORIC USE OF עָבַד IN PSALMS*

*Verb form of עָבַד*

Despite only eight uses of the verb form of עָבַד in the Psalms, all uses are metaphorical and there is a large combination of subjects and objects for the verb. The subject can be foreign kings/rulers (2:11; 18:44[43]; 72:11), foreigners (102:23[22]), worshippers of idols (97:7), or Israel (100:2; 106:36). The object can be YHWH (2:11; 22:31[30]; 100:2; 102:23[22]), idols (97:7; 106:36) or the Israelite king (18:44[43]; 72:11).

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<sup>8</sup> However, M. Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 17b; Garden City, 1970), p. 131 argues, for Pss 113:1; 134:1 and 135:1, that עָבַד יְהוָה in the MT should be repointed to read *the works of the LORD*; that is עָבַדִּי should carry the literal meaning of 'works' in these three psalms.

<sup>9</sup> R. Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, 2007), p. 441.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, p. 858; D. Kidner, *Psalms* (TOTC; Leicester, 1973, 1975), p. 435. O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (Trans. T.J. Hallett; New York, 1978), p. 320, neatly illustrates the thought of Ps 123:2 with a picture of Assyrian captives watching the hands of an overseer for their rations.

<sup>11</sup> Dahood, 1970, p. 209

<sup>12</sup> Kidner, p. 435; Anderson, p. 858.

The meaning of the verb form is tied to its object. In the context of deity, עבד means ‘to worship’ (2:11; 22:32[31]; 97:7; 100:2; 102:23[22]; 106:36), and in the context of kings, עבד means ‘to be subject to, as a vassal’ (18:44[43]; 72:11). The latter meaning occurs elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Judg 3:14; 2 Sam 10:19; 2 Kgs 10:8; 18:7), but in Psalms the focus is on the nations submitting to the Israelite king, not Israelites to foreign kings. The former meaning, ‘to worship’, occurs frequently in relation to God or to idols (e.g. Ex 4:23; Josh 24:14; 1 Kgs 9:9; Ezek 20:40). This meaning for עבד is established in references such as 1 Kgs 9:9 and Ps 97:7, where עבד is paralleled with the root, שחָה, ‘to bow down, do obeisance’. However, even שחָה is sometimes translated as ‘to worship’,<sup>13</sup> which also helps to establish עבד as carrying the metaphoric meaning ‘to worship’. As Broyles notes, ‘Biblical Hebrew does not have a word comparable to the generic English word “worship”, but the Hebrew word translated “serve” ... may be the closest equivalent.’<sup>14</sup>

However, the meaning of עבד can be fluid, even in the same psalm. In Ps 2:11, עבד could mean either ‘to be subject, as a vassal’ or ‘to worship’. This is because the ‘service’ that foreign rulers (from v.10) are to perform is וגִּילוּ בְרַעְדָּה נִשְׁקַרְבֵּר (NRSV: *with trembling [v.12] kiss the feet*), the language of submission to an overlord. Despite major translation, interpretational, and textual issues with this clause,<sup>15</sup> the sense is clear enough: the nations’ rulers are called to submit to YHWH’s king in Israel. Behind this is the thought, as the kings are to be subject to YHWH’s king, they therefore are to be subject to YHWH too. But translating the clause to mean worshipping YHWH as a deity in his own right is also possible.<sup>16</sup> Even in Ps 97:7, עבד and שחָה could be swapped without loss of meaning. If this was done, עבד would have the sense, ‘to be subject to’, but שחָה could retain its meaning of ‘to bow down, do obeisance’. A comparison of the call to worship in Ps 100:2 with Pss 95:6 and 96:9 indicates further that עבד is in effect a synonym to שחָה (95:6; 96:9) and two other terms, כָּרַע (‘to bow

<sup>13</sup> So NASB, NIV, also R. Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 320.

<sup>14</sup> Broyles, p. 386.

<sup>15</sup> Noted by many commentators; e.g. Anderson, pp. 69-70; Kidner, pp. 52-53; Davidson, p. 18; J.H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 66; Goldingay, J., *Psalms Volume 1: Psalms 1-41* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids, 2006), pp. 93-94 [list of scholars]. There are two issues: the combination of וגִּילוּ with בְּרַעְדָּה; and the meaning of נִשְׁקַרְבֵּר. For the former, the NRSV follows a common emendation that ignores or translates וגִּילוּ as ‘tremble’ (also Anderson, Davidson; c.f. Brown et al, p. 162) but a number of recent commentators (e.g. Goldingay, Alter, Broyles, Eaton), accept the MT (*rejoice with trembling*). For the latter, scholars accept the NRSV translation; suggest *kiss the son*; or suggest *do sincere homage* (following ancient commentators).

<sup>16</sup> So Eaton, 2003, pp. 64-66.

down') and כָּרַךְ ('to kneel') (95:6). These parallel calls to worship, with their different terms, allow עָבַד in 100:2 to take the meaning, 'to submit'. The issue behind this discussion is that of increasing metaphorical use: the metaphorical meaning of עָבַד as 'to give allegiance, to submit as to an overlord' is moved to the yet more metaphorical realm of worship and allegiance to a deity.

To summarise, the verb form of עָבַד in Psalms is used only with the metaphorical meanings of 'to be subject to' and 'to worship'. Both these meanings map from the literal meaning, 'to serve'. The former meaning, however, is used with the Israelite kings as receiving 'service' from the nations; therefore they are in high status. The latter meaning is similar to the meaning of a number of other Hebrew terms for the worship of deity, either of YHWH or idols.

#### *Noun form of עָבַד*

The metaphorical use of the noun form of עָבַד in Psalms is complex. First, there are six categories of 'slaves/servants', all of which relate to YHWH: creation (119:91 – *By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants* [עֲבָדֶיךָ] [NRSV]); Israel as a nation (עֲבָדֶיךָ [79:2; 102:15[14]]; עֲבָדָיו – *his servants* [105:25; 135:14]; לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדוֹ – *to his servant Israel* [136:22]); named individuals (Pss 18:1[title]; 36:1[title]; 78:70; 89:4[3], 21[20], 40[39]; 105:6, 26, 42; 132:10; 144:10); other peoples (102:29[28]); worshippers as a group (עֲבָדָיו – *his servants* [34:23[22]; 69:37[36]]; עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה – *servants of the LORD* [113:1; 134:1; 135:1]<sup>17</sup>); and the speaker in the psalm. Second, עָבַד, when used in connection with the speaker in the psalm, is used in two contexts: supplication and claims of loyalty to YHWH.

In regards to עֲבָדֶיךָ denoting Israel or other peoples, it is difficult to determine that this is the case in Pss 79:2 and in 102:15[14], 29[28]. In these two psalms, עֲבָדֶיךָ can be connected with the speaking voice. That is, עֲבָדֶיךָ is used as a term of self-deference before YHWH; that is, a circumlocution for 'we'. However, in Ps 79:1-7, עָבַד is used in parallel with נַחֲלָה (v.1; *inheritance*), חֲסִידֶיךָ (v.2; *your faithful*) and יַעֲקֹב (v.7; *Jacob*). נַחֲלָה and יַעֲקֹב refer to Israel, so

<sup>17</sup> See fn. 8 for Dahood's interpretation of עָבַד in these verses.



to keep the parallelism going, חסידך and עבדיך must also refer to Israel.<sup>18</sup> The psalm's focus on a defeat by Israel, possibly the destruction wrought by Babylon in 587 BCE,<sup>19</sup> assists this interpretation. In Ps 102:15[14], עבדיך could mean the pious worshippers in Israel<sup>20</sup> who are concerned about Jerusalem, presumably because of its status as a temple city. However, immediately next is a statement of how the nations will revere YHWH (102:16[15]), as a parallel or consequence to the *servants*' reverence for Jerusalem. The flow of thought works best if עבדיך refers to Israel.<sup>21</sup> The psalm closes with a comment that *the children* of YHWH's *servants* will live securely (102:29[28]), based on YHWH's eternal and unchanging nature (102:26-28[25-27]). These *servants*' descendents could refer to the Israelite people when Jerusalem is rebuilt (v.17[16]), or a seemingly wider but unspecified group of people (v.19[18]), or the peoples of the world who will worship (עבד) YHWH in the future (v.23[22]). The language is parallel to 69:36c-37[35c-36] but there a restoration of Judah is envisaged; here the thought is wider. The use of עבד for foreigners' actions in 102:23[22] encourages the interpretation that עבדיך in v.29[28] also has the peoples of the world in mind, though of course including Israel/Judah.

In regards to עבד denoting worshippers as a group, it could be argued that עבדיי in Pss 34:23[22] and 69:37[36] could be a form of deference of the speaking voice to YHWH, but the way the text in which the term occurs changes in both psalms argues against this.<sup>22</sup> The placing of עבדיי in Ps 34 immediately with *those who take refuge in him* in v.23[22] and more widely, *the righteous* (vv.16[15]-20[19]), and in Ps 69 with *those who love his name* in v.37[36], indicates עבדיי is a descriptor for YHWH's faithful worshippers. In Pss 113:1; 134:1 and 135:1, עבדי יהוה is connected with a 'you' in the psalm, given its use with the imperative, *praise or bless the LORD*. That is, the audience of these psalms are the עבדי יהוה. Nearly all

<sup>18</sup> C.f. Eaton, 2003, p. 287, Davidson, p. 260, Kidner, p. 286, and Anderson, p. 577, all who imply that the psalmist refers to Israel. Goldingay, 2007, pp. 521-522 is more explicit: עבדיך refers to the people of Israel. In contrast is A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. H. Hartwell; London, 1962), p. 544: the psalmist refers to the worshipping community (i.e. the pious) only.

<sup>19</sup> Most recent commentators, e.g. Eaton, 2003, p. 287; Broyles, p. 327; Alter, p. 281; Davidson, p. 260 (suggested rather than affirmed); Goldingay, 2007, pp. 519 (preferred); also Anderson, p. 577; Kidner, p. 286. Many commentators link Ps 79 with Ps 74 (e.g. Davidson, Eaton, Goldingay).

<sup>20</sup> So Anderson, pp. 286, 708; Weiser, p. 653, 654.

<sup>21</sup> Implied in Davidson, p. 332, in his understanding that 'the psalmist sees, mirrored in his own suffering, the plight of the community'; also Eaton, 2003, p. 355, in which he understands the individual in the psalm to represent the community. Alter, p. 355, simply assumes עבדיך refers to the nation.

<sup>22</sup> Ps 34:16[15]-23[22] is a teaching segment that does not involve the 'I' voice of the psalm; Ps 69:35[34]-37[36] is recognised to be a song of, or exhortation to, praise that focuses on the restoration of Zion, not the deliverance of the voice in the psalm. See, e.g. Broyles, pp. 168, 288; Eaton, 2003, p. 155; Kidner, pp. 141, 245; Davidson, p. 221; Anderson, p. 499.

commentators for the three psalms understand עבדי יהוה to be the worshipping congregation, helped by Ps 135:19-20, which indicates that עבדי יהוה in 135:1 covers the priests, Levites and those who *fear the LORD*.

### עבד AS A TERM OF DEFERENCE BEFORE YHWH

The occurrence of עבד in connection with the voice in the psalms is the most frequent use and usually as a form of deference before YHWH. There are two types of use.

The first is the more typical (26 times [13 times in Ps 119]). This is the singular עבדך (*your servant*) in connection with an individual ('I') voice in a psalm, for example:

*Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;  
save your servant who trusts in you.  
You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to you do I cry all day long.  
Gladden the soul of your servant,  
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. (Ps 86:2-4; NRSV)*

*Even though princes sit plotting against me,  
Your servant will meditate on your statutes. (Ps 119:23; NRSV)*

The second type of use is the plural, עבדיך (*your servants*) in connection with a plural voice ('we') (four times: Pss 79:10; 89:51[50]<sup>23</sup>; 90:13, 16), for example:

*Why should the nations say,  
"Where is their God?"  
Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants  
Be known among the nations before our eyes. (79:10; NRSV)*

The connection of עבדך and עבדיך with the voice in the psalm allows for the interpretation of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH. In most cases, the connection is close, as in Ps 86:2, *Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you* (also 86:4, 16; 19:14[13]; 27:9; 35:27; 69:18[17]; 79:10; 90:13, 16; 109:28; 143:2; and especially in Ps 119). In effect, עבדך is a circumlocution for 'I' and עבדיך is a circumlocution for 'we'.

<sup>23</sup> There is a textual issue with עבדיך in Ps 89:51[50]. The MT, LXX and Jerome read the plural עבדיך, but the Syriac and other mss read the singular עבדך (see Anderson, p. 647). The NRSV and many commentators follow the Syriac, to make עבדך fit the 'I' voice speaking in the psalm in the verse (e.g. Davidson, p. 297; Broyles, p. 357; Kidner, p. 325; Johnson, A.R., *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967) 113, fn.1). However, the plural also works, as it can refer back to the momentary change of voice to 'we' in vv.18[17]-19[18] (c.f. Goldingay, 2007, 689). That is, even though the 'I' speaks in v.51[50], it recognises that the congregation is also affected by the disaster it recounts. See Dahood, 1968, p. 320 for another interpretation.

In three cases, however, the connection between the speaker in the psalm and עבד is explicit:

*O LORD, I am your servant* (אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ יְהוָה כִּי־אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ),  
*I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.* (אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ בְּתוּלָתָךְ)  
*You have loosed my bonds* (Ps 116:16, NRSV)

*I am your servant* (עַבְדְּךָ־אֲנִי); *give me understanding,*  
*so that I may know of your decrees.* (Ps 119:125, NRSV)

*In your steadfast love cut off my enemies,*  
*and destroy all my adversaries,*  
*for I am your servant* (כִּי אֲנִי עַבְדְּךָ). (Ps 143:12, NRSV)

This explicit connection of 'I' with עבד (עבדך is used as a predicate to 'I') not only shows that עבד is a term of deference before YHWH, but can be a substitute for 'I'.

This is borne out in the psalm references just noted for the close connection of עבד with 'I': each occurrence of עבדך could be substituted with the personal pronoun 'I'. That is, not only is עבד a term of deference before YHWH, it can also be used as a circumlocution for the voice in the psalm, 'I' or 'we'. It is this phenomenon that עבד can be substituted for 'I' or 'we' that makes it a term of deference before YHWH. Many commentators miss this connection of עבד with the voice of the psalm even when they recognise when עבדך and עבדיך relate to the speaker in the psalm;<sup>24</sup> or else they constantly emphasise the idea that 'the slave is obligated to the master, the master to the slave',<sup>25</sup> helped in part by Ps 86:2.<sup>26</sup>

#### CONTEXT OF USE OF עבד AS A TERM OF DEFERENCE BEFORE YHWH

The use of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH relates to a second aspect of the complexity of the use of the noun form of עבד in Psalms: the context in which עבד as a term of deference before YHWH appears. Two contexts are apparent: supplication and statements of loyalty or obedience to YHWH.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, p. 225 (c.f. p.614), is an exception: he argues that all appearances in the Psalms of *your servant* (singular), are circumlocutions of 'I' (e.g. 19:12, 14[11, 13]; 27:9; 31:17[16]; 35:27; 69:18[17]; 86:4). Brown et al, p. 714, also recognises this to occur.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Davidson, pp. 284, 382, 400; Goldingay, 2007, pp. 513, 521, 619-621, 669, 689. C.f. Eaton, *Kingship*, p. 149.

<sup>26</sup> Davidson, p. 284; Goldingay, 2007, pp. 619-621; c.f. Eaton, 2003, p. 310; Kidner, p. 311.

In regards to עֶבֶד as used as a term of deference before YHWH in the context of supplication, the supplications are of three types: requests for protection or deliverance (15 times [four times in Ps 119], requests for help to be loyal to YHWH (13 times [eight times in Ps 119]), and general requests for YHWH's mercy or favour (17 times [six times in Ps 119]).

The category, 'requests for deliverance or protection', covers those supplications that use the language of human opposition or hostility to the voice in the psalm, e.g.

*Do not hide your face from your servant,  
For I am in distress – make haste to answer me.  
Draw near to me, to redeem me,  
set me free because of my enemies.* (Ps 69:18-19[17-18] [NRSV])

*How long must your servant endure?  
When will you judge those who persecute me?  
The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me;  
they flout your laws* (Ps 119:84-85 [NRSV])

In all cases, the use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH occurs only in the singular form (עֶבְדְּךָ) and is connected with an individual (singular) voice in the psalm. That is, when עֶבֶד as a circumlocution for 'I' appears in a context of supplication to YHWH about 'enemies', only the situation of the individual is contemplated.

The category, 'request for help to obey or be loyal to YHWH', covers those uses of עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH when a need for assistance to be loyal is expressed by the speaker, e.g.

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,  
and I will observe it to the end.  
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law  
And observe it with my whole heart.  
Lead me in the path of commandments,  
for I delight in it.  
Turn my heart to your decrees,  
and not to selfish gain.  
Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;  
give me life in your ways.  
Confirm to your servant your promise,  
which is for those who fear you.* (Ps 119:33-38 [NRSV])

This use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH occurs only in the singular form (עֶבְדְּךָ) and is also connected with an individual (singular) voice of the psalm. That is, when עֶבֶד as a circumlocution for 'I' appears in a context of supplication to YHWH about assistance to be

loyal to YHWH, only the situation of the individual is contemplated, like for when עֶבֶד appears in connection with requests for protection or deliverance.

The category, ‘requests for YHWH’s mercy or favour’, covers those requests in which some favour or positive response is sought from YHWH, usually in a general way, e.g.

*Let your work be manifest to your servants,  
and your glorious power to their children.  
Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,  
and prosper the work of our hands –  
O prosper the work of our hands! (Ps 90:16-17 [NRSV])*

*Let your steadfast love become my comfort  
according to your promise to your servant (Ps 119:76 [NRSV])*

When supplication for YHWH’s favour is coupled with other supplications, the ‘favour’ is sometimes specified: forgiveness (Ps 119:176; 143:2), freedom from sin (Ps 19:12[11]; 119:133-134), or YHWH not to be angry (Ps 27:9).

In contrast to the supplication contexts of protection or deliverance from human-caused problems and assistance to be loyal to YHWH, the context of supplication for YHWH’s favour includes עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH in connection with the plural voice (Pss 79, 89, 90). In these psalms, motifs such as Israel’s defeat by foreign armies (Pss 79, 89), or Israel’s sinfulness and the people’s mortality before YHWH (Ps 90) are present. In effect, the ‘we’ voice prays on behalf of the nation and asks YHWH to forgive and restore the nation.

The idea behind a request for help or deliverance from human-caused problems (enemies, accusers, etc) is easy enough to understand: the voice in the psalm is in trouble and asks YHWH to deliver him from that trouble. However, the reason why עֶבֶד is used as an substitute for the ‘I’ in this context is not immediately apparent. Anderson suggests that the use of עֶבֶד ‘is a more polite way of saying ‘me’’, recognised also by Brown et al.<sup>27</sup> That this is true is evidenced from, for example, ANE letters in which lesser status people use ‘servant’ as a term of deference to higher status or superior persons.<sup>28</sup> However, Anderson has not

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, p. 225; Brown et al, 714, (עֶבֶד #6).

<sup>28</sup> E.g. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago, 1948), p. 254 (Assyrian); F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J.J.M. Roberts, C.L. Seow, R.E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven,

established a connection for the application of the term before deity. A better suggestion is that the language reflects the common ANE practice of people calling themselves a ‘servant’ of a deity, examples of which are found in the seal inscriptions of kings, temple staff (male and female), people of unknown status, and in literary (religious) texts.<sup>29</sup> This could be built on to further suggest that the language reflects the typical power relations of the ANE: absolute or near absolute monarchy,<sup>30</sup> which is then applied to the human’s relationship with deity or deities. This is to say, in technical language for the study of metaphor, the metaphor is a servant relationship with YHWH, the vehicle of the metaphor is power relations and the tenor is the human’s relationship with deity.

The problem with using power relations as the vehicle is that it is already metaphorical language, as discussed above for the verb form of עבד. עבד as ‘obedience’ or ‘worship’ is itself is the tenor of a metaphor (to ‘serve’ YHWH or a king), of which a service or work relationship is the vehicle. It is certainly possible for one metaphor to be used as a vehicle for another metaphor (e.g. the existence of dead metaphors and conceptual metaphors indicate that metaphorical speech can become ‘literal’ over time), but the use of עבד in the second supplication context, request for help to be loyal to YHWH, suggests that the psalmists have gone back to the literal meanings of עבד to provide the vehicle for the עבדך metaphor. In this context, the request for help to be loyal is itself a statement of loyalty (the speaker wants to be loyal), but it also indicates a dependency on YHWH in order to do so. Both relate to the slave relation-

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London, 2005), pp. 306, 358-359 (Hebrew); B. Porten (ed. and trans.), *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans on Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translations* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 80-81, 83, 90 (Jews writing in Aramaic, in Egypt); A.E.-M. Bakir, *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (ASALE Supp 18; Cairo, 1952), p. 21 (Egyptian).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g. for seals, W.W. Hallo, “Seal Inscriptions”, in B. Buchanan (ed.), *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 445, 455-462 [Babylonian seals]; B. Teisser, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 336-337 [also Babylonian seals]; and N. Avigad, “The Contribution of Hebrew Seals to an Understanding of Israelite Religion and Society”, in P.D. Miller Jr, P.D. Hanson, S.D. McBride (eds), *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 197-198 [Hebrew seal]. For religious texts, see the collection of texts in J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern texts relating to the Old Testament* 3rd Ed (Princeton, 1969), and articles such as W.G. Lambert, “Dingir.sa.dib.ba Incantations”, *JNES* 33 (1974), p. 279.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g. Frankfort, pp. 6, 52-53, 60, 251; A.K. Grayson, “Assyrian Civilisation”, in *The Cambridge Ancient History Vol. III, Part 2* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 196, 205; M.A. Dandamaev, “Neo-Babylonian Society and Economy”, in *The Cambridge Ancient History Volume vol III, Part 2* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 253; S. Smith, “The Practice of Kingship in Early Semitic Kingdoms”, in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, (ed., S.H. Hooke; Oxford, 1958), p. 24. See also E. Bridge, “Enslaved to an Artifice: a Study into the Truth behind the Title of Deference, ‘Slave/Servant’, as used in the Ancient Near East before the Time of Alexander The Great”, *Humanity* 2 (2008), ([www.humanities.mq.edu.au/humanity/](http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/humanity/); forthcoming) [Correction since publication: the URL to Bridge, ‘Enslaved’ is now <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Schools/Humanities%20and%20Social%20Science/Humanity/Bridge.pdf>].

ship with the master: slaves depend on their master just to be alive, and they are expected to serve the master. That is, the slave relationship is the vehicle for the tenor (relationship with YHWH).

It is also noteworthy that in the recognised ‘enthronement’ or ‘YHWH as heavenly king’ psalms (Pss 47, 93, 96-99), עֶבֶד does not appear. When the YHWH as king theme is applied to the worshipping congregation (in Pss 95, 100; not usually recognised as ‘heavenly king’ psalms<sup>31</sup>), imagery of *sheep*, *heritage*, and God as *Maker* are used. All these images connote ownership and control by YHWH (especially *heritage*; but *sheep* also alludes to a recognised ANE image of the monarch as *shepherd*<sup>32</sup>), all of which match with the ownership implication in servant language. *Maker* alludes also to a recognised ANE motif in religious texts that the gods have created the individual worshipper who uses the text<sup>33</sup> and itself may carry the connotation of service to the gods, given that a number of Mesopotamian creation myths have humans created for the sole reason to serve the deities.<sup>34</sup>

When supplication for help to be loyal is combined with a request for protection or deliverance (Pss 27:9; 86; 119:134-135; 143:12) or with a request for YHWH’s favour (Pss 27:9; Ps 86; Ps 119 *passim*; 143:2), the request for help to be loyal strengthens the other request. That is, the desire to be faithful to YHWH is tantamount to a declaration of loyalty to YHWH, and so the voice in the psalm deserves YHWH to favourably answer the other request. In this context, ANE power relationships could be a vehicle for the עֶבֶד metaphor, suggested by an Egyptian painting in which a servant of the Egyptian king, Amenophis IV, does obeisance to his lord, and then is exalted by his peers, having been favoured by the king.

<sup>31</sup> For Ps 95 as a ‘heavenly king’ psalm: C.H. Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (EBS; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), pp. 188, 195; S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship, in 2 Volumes* (trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), I, pp. 122, 156. For Ps 100 as a ‘heavenly king’ psalm: M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51-100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 17; Garden City, 1968), p. 370. Both psalms are related to Pss 93, 96-99; e.g. YHWH is described as a king in Ps 95:3; the call to worship in Ps 100:1-2 (c.f. 98:4-6); and the ‘entrance’ theme in Ps 100:4 (c.f. 96:8) (c.f. D.M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93-100* [BJS 5; Winona Lake, 1997], pp. 96-97, 180-181).

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Frankfort, pp. 237, 238 (citing texts).

<sup>33</sup> Lambert, p. 279 (section I, line 79); H.G. Güterbock, ‘Hittite parallels’, *JNES* 33 (1974), pp. 323, 325 (CTH 374 text; Prayer of Kantuzzili, line 12 [also in Pritchard, pp. 400-401]).

<sup>34</sup> This is found in texts such as *Enuma Elish*; *Enki, Ninmakh, and the Creation of Mankind*; and *Epic of Atrahasis*. See, e.g. B.T. Arnold, B.E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East* (EBS; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), pp. 20, 21-25, 42-44. The question here is how much ancient Israelites knew of these myths, and at what point the Creation accounts in Gen 1-3 became commonly known. However, in Gen 2:15, עֲבָד appears with the meaning ‘to work’, not for YHWH, but in the garden. Thus, even ancient Israelites recognised ‘work’ as something intrinsic to humanity’s existence, but not for a deity as such.

Keel uses this to illustrate Pss 30:1; 118:28; 145:1 in combination with Pss 9:13 and 18:46<sup>35</sup> (see also Ps 145:14), all of which indicate that loyalty to YHWH results in favour.

However, that the primary vehicle for the עבד metaphor is the social institution of slavery, not kingship, is made clear when עבד is used as a term of deference before YHWH in all three supplication contexts (Pss 27; 86; 119; 143); for example:

*Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;  
save your servant who trusts in you.*

...

*O God, the insolent rise up against me;  
a band of ruffians sees my life,  
and they do not set you before them.*

...

*Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart to revere your name*

...

*Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant;  
save the child of your serving girl.  
Show me a sign of your favor,  
So that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, ...*  
(Ps 86:2ab, 11, 14, 16-17ab [NRSV])

The combination of all three supplication types gives a picture of utter dependence upon YHWH. This relates more closely to the situation of slavery, ‘abject dependence’ on the master,<sup>36</sup> than the common person in relation to the king. Ps 86:16 highlights this picture of utter dependence on YHWH by the use of *child of your serving girl* as a parallel for *your servant*. Here, using the image of the houseborn slave, the voice in the psalm imagines always having been ‘owned’ by YHWH. That is, his whole existence is dependent on YHWH and his reason for existence is emphasised as being solely for YHWH. In this we come back to Ps 123:2, in which the image of slaves who are trained to watch for the smallest gesture has become a statement of trust in YHWH’s favour. This again indicates that when עבד is used as a term of deference for the voices in the psalms, plural or singular, in the context of supplication, the social institution of slavery is the vehicle to describe the relationship with YHWH with the metaphors, עבדך for the ‘I’ voice and עבדיך for the plural voice.

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<sup>35</sup> Keel, pp. 350, 352.

<sup>36</sup> Alter, p. 441, noted above.



Ps 86:2, with the comment, *for I am devoted to you*, indicates the second context for which עבד is used as a term of deference before YHWH: statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH, which occurs 19 times in total in Psalms. In Ps 86, the two contexts, supplication and statements of loyalty to YHWH, are placed together. This also occurs in Pss 19, 31, 69, and for all occurrences of עבד in Ps 119, except for v.38 (a total of 12 times).

Only once does עבד appear as a term of deference before YHWH in the context of a claim of loyalty to YHWH when there is no supplication expressed. This is in Ps 116:16, in which the voice (in the singular) gives thanks for YHWH having *already* answered a supplication (vv.1, 4). The effect, however, is the same as for those psalms in which statements of loyalty are connected with supplication: the speaker presents himself as a faithful worshipper of YHWH, helped also by the repetition of *I am your servant* and paralleling this with *the child of your handmaid*. The effect of making statements or claims of obedience in connection with supplication is the same as for making requests for help to obey YHWH in combination with other requests: the voice in the psalm claims loyalty and so deserves YHWH's favour. However, this is now brought out clearly; see especially Ps 119. In this context, the literal meaning of עבד, submission and dependency, remains apparent.

#### עבד USED OTHER THAN AS A TERM OF DEFERENCE BEFORE YHWH

In contrast to the use of עבד as a term of deference to YHWH, the other categories of the metaphorical use of the noun form of עבד are rarely used as an element in supplication. In Pss 105:25; 135:14 and 136:22, in which עבד is used of Israel as a title, the context is a review of Israel's history and עבד is a parallel term for *people*. However, in Pss 79:2 and 102:15[14], עבד appears in the context of supplication (both psalms are laments). However עבדיך in 79:2 is not used directly to motivate YHWH to answer the supplication, though the parallelism with *your faithful* (חסידך) in the context of death by warfare, is an appeal to emotions. Rather, the images that are used directly to motivate YHWH to answer the supplication are *prisoners* (79:11) and *flock* (79:13; in parallelism with *your people*). In contrast is Ps 102:15[14], in which עבדיך does form a direct appeal for YHWH to answer the supplication. Here, עבדיך are emotionally attached to the apparently ruined Zion, and ask that YHWH should also be the same (v.14[13]). There is also parallelism between vv.13-15[12-14] and vv.16-18[15-17], but with the latter anticipating YHWH's response, in which *prayer of the destitute* forms the

parallel with *your servants hold its stones dear*. Here, as with the use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH, עֶבֶד is used with the sense of loyalty and dependency.

At the end of Ps 102, the comment, *the children of your servants*, in reference to all peoples of the world (see discussion above), forms part of a statement of hope, typical in lament psalms.<sup>37</sup> It is part of a description of YHWH's people and their security in YHWH in contrast to the created world having an ending. In Ps 119:91, the once only use of עֶבְדֶּיךָ in relation to something other than the voice in the psalm (*all [created] things*) indicates that YHWH has created the world and controls it. The supplication in the verse's context (vv.89-96) is carried by *I am yours* (v.94, לֹךְ-אֲנִי), which is similar in intent to *for I am your servant* in Ps 143:12. That is, the voice claims to be 'owned' by YHWH, therefore YHWH should look after his 'possession'.

Similar to the occurrences of עֶבֶד as a title for Israel, the use of the term for named individuals is mostly found in the context of a review of Israel's history (Pss 78:70; 89:4[3], 21[20], 40[39]; 105:6, 26, 42). It is also found twice in ascriptions (Pss 18:1, 36:1). In all cases, the individuals are famous in Israelite history, noted elsewhere in the Bible and in Pss 78:70-72; 89:20-21[19-20] for their loyalty to YHWH. In these occurrences, עֶבֶד functions as a title of status, similar to that indicated in ancient seals. This is helped by the occasional paralleling of עֶבֶד with *chosen* (Ps 89:20-21[19-20]; 105:26).<sup>38</sup> This use of עֶבֶד also reflects the ANE practice of people calling themselves the *servant of [a deity]*.<sup>39</sup> Status is also implied in the once only use of עֶבֶד to designate the subjects or officials of a king (Ps 135:9). This follows both biblical and ANE practice (shown in seal inscriptions, see above) of officials and other people describing themselves as 'servant' of the king.<sup>40</sup> In all cases for the ANE, the status is derived, e.g. the seal-owner's status is something that is measured by reference to another, and carries implied loyalty.<sup>41</sup> However, in Ps 144:10, the title, *his servant David* (אֶת-דָּוִד עֶבְדּוֹ) is closely linked with the voice ('I') in the psalm, which because of this title can be consider-

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Bullock, p. 142; Broyles, pp. 16-17; Goldingay, 2006, 63; E.C. Lucas, *Exploring the Old Testament III: A Guide to the Psalms and Wisdom Literature* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), p. 3; L. Sabourin, *The Psalms: Their Origin and Meaning* (Alba House, 1974), pp. 215-264.

<sup>38</sup> Emphasised in Eaton, 1976, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> See fn.29 above.

<sup>40</sup> Bridge "Enslaved".

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g. Hallo, p. 441, for Babylonian seals: 'Rank is identified as a subordinate relationship to a higher authority, and determined by the level of that authority.' 'The relationship is normally expressed by "servant" (ĪR), or "maidservant" (GEMÉ); more rarely by "man" (LÚ)'; discussed also in Bridge "Enslaved".

ed to be the voice of the Davidic king.<sup>42</sup> That is, אֶת־דָּוִד עֶבֶד becomes a circumlocution for 'I'. But the idea of status still remains, shown by the use of the title in parallel with מַלְכִּים and in a statement of YHWH's favouring מַלְכִּים by giving them victory. This in turn becomes the motivation for a (repeated) supplication that YHWH rescue the voice from foreigners (v.11; see vv.7-8). Therefore עֶבֶד is used to motivate supplication on the basis of status.

In Ps 132:10, עֶבֶד as a title for an individual (*your servant David* [דָּוִד עֶבֶד]) is also used in the context of supplication, but is differentiated from the voice in the psalm, a 'we' (vv.6-7).<sup>43</sup> Here, in contrast to Ps 144:10, but in similar fashion to the use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference in the context of supplication, the motivation for YHWH to favourably answer the supplication works on the implied loyalty and submission עֶבֶד carries, indicated in vv.1-5: a retelling of David's desire to build YHWH a *dwelling place*.

When עֶבֶד is used to refer to worshippers as a group (Pss 34:23[22]; 69:37[36]<sup>44</sup>; 113:1; 134:1; 135:1), it is used in the context that the worshippers are faithful to YHWH (see above). That is, עֶבֶד in this context is used with the sense of loyalty, in similar fashion for when it is used for Israel and as a term of deference to YHWH for the speaker in the psalm.

To summarise, when עֶבֶד is not used as a term of deference to YHWH, it can carry the idea of status (for individuals, Israel, peoples). Otherwise it carries the idea of dependency and loyalty (worshippers as a group, created world, also Israel). These occurrences of עֶבֶד are not normally found in the context of supplication, but when this happens, עֶבֶד carries the implication of dependency and submission to YHWH (Pss 102:15[14]; 132:10), except for Ps 144:10 where the implication of status remains.

<sup>42</sup> Broyles, p. 20 (contra p. 501); Mowinckel I, pp. 48, 225; Sabourin, pp. 336-337 (implied, but unsure); Dahood, 1970, p. 328 (as part of a composite psalm); S.J.L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (JSOTSS 44; Sheffield, 1987), p. 105 (implied). However, Goldingay, 2006, p. 60, thinks Ps 144 is a 'prayer of the congregation', which means the voice is representative. Weiser, p.824, recognises that Ps 144 is the voice of the king, but that דָּוִד עֶבֶד refers literally to David, and is used to in the context that YHWH has given victory to all the kings from David onwards.

<sup>43</sup> Those scholars who attempt to identify the voice in Ps 132 suggest that vv.8-10 are spoken by a leader of the congregation (Dahood, 1970, p. 241), or a cultic prophet (Croft, pp. 102-103; A.R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* [Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967], p. 22). Otherwise the psalm is debated as to its genre and who the voice in the psalm best represents. That the king is referred to in vv.8-10 is beyond doubt; see, e.g. Mowinckel I, p. 48, Johnson, p. 19, and Croft, pp. 102-104, all who understand the psalm to have been written for a ritual that involves the king.

<sup>44</sup> The NRSV, following the Syriac version, adds עֶבְדָּי in v.36c[35c] to make it read, *and his servants shall live there and possess it*, where as the MT reads, *and they shall live there and possess it*.

## CONCLUSIONS

The metaphorical use of עֶבֶד in Psalms is built on the literal meaning of the term, ‘to serve’ (verb) and ‘slave/servant’ (noun). In most cases, the term carries the idea of dependency and loyalty. Yet the idea of status also appears, particularly when עֶבֶד is used for named individuals and Israel. In the verb form, the nations are pictured as subject to the Israelite king, and worshippers are in effect subject to YHWH. In the noun form, it is commonly used as a term of deference by the voice in the psalm instead of ‘I’ and ‘we’. Most of these uses are in the context of supplication and many are connected with statements of loyalty to YHWH. The types of supplication to which עֶבֶד is connected indicate that the term carries the meaning of submission and dependency such as a chattel slave owes his or her master. Loyalty to YHWH is also indicated, brought out well in Pss 86:2 and 123:2. In the former, the voice in the psalm clearly states it is devoted to YHWH. In the latter, ‘the abject dependency of the slave to his master’ has been transformed into an illustration of trust in YHWH to intervene in a situation of difficulty. Yet the illustration as a statement of trust works only because of the self-description of ‘abject dependency’.

עֶבֶד as indicating loyalty to YHWH is an emotional argument for YHWH to answer supplication, but the psalms in which עֶבֶד appears do not emphasise any obligation for YHWH to answer favourably, except maybe in Pss 86:16 and 143:12. In both cases, ownership by YHWH of the voice in the psalm is implied, so the supplications work on the emotional logic of ‘care for your possession’. Along with this is the lack of use of עֶבֶד in the context of the voice in the psalm being exalted or ‘lifted up’ by YHWH (Ps 27:6 may be an exception). That is, עֶבֶד is not normally a term that indicates a reciprocal relationship with YHWH such as Goldingay and Eaton argue.<sup>45</sup> Some psalms do attempt to obligate YHWH to answer supplication, but this is done with concepts and images such as YHWH’s covenant with Israel, *your people*, and YHWH’s *love* (חסד) for them (c.f. Pss 94:23 and 99:5, 8, 9 [*the LORD our God*]; 106:45; 118:29; 121:3-5; 143:12), which is sometimes individualised (e.g. Pss 86:2,

<sup>45</sup> See fn. 25 above. Eaton starts his section on עֶבֶד in connection with ‘the ideal of the King’s Office in the Psalms’ with the comment, ‘When used as a pre-eminent servant of YHWH, it denotes one whom God has chosen for a position of intimacy and trust, with authority as his chief minister and the executive of his will’ (Eaton, 1976, p. 149 and fn. 30), following Zimmerli and Jeremias, p. 9.

121:3-5; 143:10).<sup>46</sup> These concepts and images refer to YHWH's side of the relationship with the voices in the psalms, and so with the worshippers who use these psalms. Rarely are such terms as חסד, אהב and כבד used for the human side of the relationship;<sup>47</sup> rather, love for, and loyalty and commitment to, YHWH are expressed in action (*I will praise ...; I will offer sacrifices ...*). The use of עבד in the psalms as a title of deference before YHWH fits this emphasis on action on the human side with its contextual use in supplication and statements of loyalty. That is, עבד is an image that shows dependency and loyalty to YHWH.

This study has remained within the biblical text. With regard to the voice in the psalms, observations so far indicate that there is a correlation of the use of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH with the speaker in the psalms. When עבד relates to an 'I' voice, it is done in connection with supplications that include requests for protection or deliverance, and the need for help to be loyal to YHWH. It is also found in connection with statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH. However, when עבד relates to a 'we' voice, it is done only in connection with requests for YHWH's favour and there is no connection with statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH. With regard to the genre of psalms, a preliminary observation is that the use of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH is found only in psalms classified as 'laments' or 'prayer psalms' and the two psalms, 19 and 119, both of which include elements of 'lament psalms', especially Ps 119.<sup>48</sup> What this means in regards to the question of the use of עבד in the religious thought of ancient Israel is a matter for further study, especially in the light of discussion as to the identity of the voice in the psalms.

<sup>46</sup> C.f. Goldingay, 2007, p. 621 for Ps 86:2. Note that the individualisation of the of the covenant relationship occurs in close connection to the use of עבד in Pss 86 and 143, which is a further argument that עבד is not the term that the psalmists used to obligate YHWH to answer the supplication.

<sup>47</sup> Highlighted well, for חסד, by W.L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy", *CBQ* 25 (1963), pp. 77-87; cited in S. Ackerman, "The personal is political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love ('āhēb, 'ahābā), in the Hebrew Bible", *VT* 52 (2002), p. 437. See also S.M. Olyan, "Honor, Shame and Covenant Relationships in Ancient Israel and its Environment", *JBL* 115 (1996), p. 204. Ackerman deals with אהב and Olyan deals with כבד. For example, despite all the expressions of devotion in the Psalms, only once is devotion to YHWH described by אהב (Ps 116:1), though Ackerman notes the use of אהב in Psalms in connection with YHWH's house, the torah, YHWH's name and so on (Ackerman, 446). Ackerman and Olyan note that the situation is the same in the rest of the Bible.

<sup>48</sup> C.f. J.L. Mays, "The Place of the Torah-Psalms in the Psalter", *JBL* 106 (1987), pp. 6-7; using A. Deissler, *Psalm 119 (118), und seine Theologie* (MTS 1/2; Munich: Zink, 1955), 270-80.

## ABSTRACT

An exploration of the use of *'bd* in the Psalms shows that it is almost exclusively used metaphorically. As a verb, this study affirms translations such as 'to worship' in reference to deity, and 'to be subject to' in reference to human power. As a noun, it is used to describe a wide range of things or people, all in relation to the YHWH. Of interest is how *'bd* is used as a metaphor (*'bdk/'bdk*) for the voice in a number of psalms, effectively being a substitution for 'I' or 'we'. This use is always connected with supplication and or claims of loyalty to YHWH, and shows that *'bd* indicates the relationship of the voice in the psalm to YHWH is that of dependency, submission and loyalty. When used to describe others outside of the voice in the psalm, the term can indicate status, but always derived status.

## KEYWORDS

Psalms, metaphor, servant, supplication

### 8.2.2. Additional comments

#### 8.2.2.1. DATA FOR ANALYSIS OF עִבָּד IN PSALMS

The analysis in Section 8.2.1 was derived from the following tables:

**Table 3 – use of the verb form of עִבָּד in Psalms**

| Psalm Text | Subject of the Verb  |            |                      |        | Object of the Verb |       |                | Metaphoric Use |                        |
|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|--------|--------------------|-------|----------------|----------------|------------------------|
|            | Foreign kings/rulers | Foreigners | Worshippers of idols | Israel | Yahweh             | Idols | Israelite king | Worship        | Allegiance to overlord |
| 2:11       | ×                    |            |                      |        | ×                  |       |                | ×              |                        |
| 18:44[43]  | ×                    |            |                      |        |                    |       | ×              |                | ×                      |
| 22:31[30]  |                      |            |                      |        | ×                  |       |                | ×              |                        |
| 72:11      | ×                    |            |                      |        |                    |       | ×              |                | ×                      |
| 97:7       |                      |            | ×                    |        |                    | ×     |                | ×              |                        |
| 100:2      |                      |            |                      | ×      | ×                  |       |                | ×              |                        |
| 102:23[22] |                      | ×          |                      |        | ×                  |       |                | ×              |                        |
| 106:36     |                      |            |                      | ×      |                    | ×     |                | ×              |                        |

**Table 4 – Use of the noun form of עֶבֶד in Psalms as a term for deference to Yahweh and the context in it is used**

| Text      | Deference to Yahweh       |                       |                      | Supplication Context |               |            | Claim to Obey Yahweh |
|-----------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|------------|----------------------|
|           | Singular – singular voice | Plural – plural voice | Plural – third party | For Protection       | For Obedience | For Favour |                      |
| 19:12[11] | ×                         |                       |                      |                      |               | ×          | ×                    |
| 19:14[13] | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               | ×          | ×                    |
| 27:9      | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          |                      |
| 31:17[16] | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            | ×                    |
| 34:23[22] |                           |                       | ×                    |                      |               |            |                      |
| 35:27     | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            |                      |
| 69:18[17] | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            | ×                    |
| 69:37[36] |                           |                       | ×                    |                      |               |            |                      |
| 79:10     |                           | ×                     |                      |                      |               | ×          |                      |
| 86:2      | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          | ×                    |
| 86:4      | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          | ×                    |
| 86:16     | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          |                      |
| 89:51[50] |                           | ×                     |                      |                      |               | ×          |                      |
| 90:13     |                           | ×                     |                      |                      |               | ×          |                      |
| 90:16     |                           | ×                     |                      |                      |               | ×          |                      |
| 109:28    | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            |                      |
| 113:1     |                           |                       | ×                    |                      |               |            |                      |
| 116:16    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      |               |            | ×                    |
| 119:17    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      | ×             |            | ×                    |
| 119:23    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      |               | ×          | ×                    |
| 119:38    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      | ×             |            |                      |
| 119:49    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      |               | ×          | ×                    |
| 119:65    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      | ×             |            | ×                    |
| 119:76    | ×                         |                       |                      |                      |               | ×          | ×                    |
| 119:84    | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            | ×                    |
| 119:122   | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            | ×                    |
| 119:124   | ×                         |                       |                      |                      | ×             | ×          | ×                    |
| 119:125   | ×                         |                       |                      |                      | ×             |            | ×                    |
| 119:135   | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          | ×                    |
| 119:140   | ×                         |                       |                      |                      | ×             |            | ×                    |
| 119:176   | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          | ×                    |
| 134:1     |                           |                       | ×                    |                      |               |            |                      |
| 135:1     |                           |                       | ×                    |                      |               |            |                      |
| 143:2     | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    | ×             | ×          |                      |
| 143:12    | ×                         |                       |                      | ×                    |               |            |                      |

<sup>49</sup> There is a translation difficulty with מוֹדִים, translated as ‘arrogant, insolent.’ Does it refer to the speaker’s own sins, implied in v.13b[12b] (so RSV, NASB, NIV; Eaton, *Psalms*, 111; implied in Broyles, *Psalms*, 109), or arrogant people (so NRSV, John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2: Psalms 42-89* [BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007] 295; Davidson, *Vitality*, 73; Alter, *Psalms*, 63; Mays, J.L., *Psalms* [Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994] 100)? I will accept the consensus by the recent commentators, which is that the speaker refers to inadvertent sins and wilfully sinful people. However, Goldingay, *Psalms*, II:295 argues that the parallel refers only to sinful people, that is ‘secret [things]’ in v.13[12] refer to the sins of the arrogant. In this case, the supplication context is only ‘supplication for protection/deliverance’.

### 8.2.2.2. LOYALTY AND COMMITMENT TO YHWH EXPRESSED AS ACTION

In Section 8.2.1, comment was made that ‘love for, and loyalty and commitment to, YHWH are expressed in action (*I will praise ...; I will offer sacrifices ...*).’ This was said on the basis of Ackerman, Olyan and Moran, but Psalms bears this out. In lament/prayer and thanksgiving psalms, when responses are made to what YHWH will do or has done, they usually contain clauses such as *I will praise* or *I will give thanks/offer thanksgiving*.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes a commitment to offer sacrifices is expressed,<sup>51</sup> or expressions of commitment to YHWH, in similar fashion to that discussed above in psalms such as Ps 90 and 143.<sup>52</sup>

Politeness theory bears out Ackerman and Olyan’s observations. Brown and Levinson’s comment, that thanks is frequently expressed in terms of humbling one’s own face and/or obligation to the hearer,<sup>53</sup> used in Chapter 5.3 to discuss the ‘dog’ formula in the Lachish letters, in Chapter 6.2.2.5-6 for Abigail, 6.3.2.5 for Joab, and 7.2.2.4 for Jacob, provides a framework in which Ackerman and Olyan’s and my comments fit. The psalms reflect the ‘obligations’ side of thanks: YHWH will do something or has done something for the voice in the psalm, so the voice expresses thanks along with suchs obligation to YHWH as praise, going to the temple, and/or offering sacrifices. Only rarely is self-abasement used (e.g. Ps 116:16). This contrasts with narrative texts (including prayer in those texts) and the Lachish letters in which thanks is usually in the form of self-abasement.<sup>54</sup> This avoids obligations to the giver of whatever has been received. The change in emphasis suits Psalms: worship of God presupposes obligation to God, whereas in human interactions, the more a person can avoid being obligated to another, the better. A similar situation of lack of self-abasement, though with a different intent, is found in Psalms 2, 3 13, 41 and 42-43, in which ‘enemies’ figure prominently. Coetzee, who uses politeness theory, notes that the voice in each of these psalms presents the best possible view of its relationship with YHWH in order to motivate

<sup>50</sup> For lament/prayer psalms, see: Pss 5:11; 13:6; 26:12; 28:7; 35:9-10, 28; 44:8; 57:9; 59:16-17; 69:30; 71:15-16; 73:28; 79:13; 86:12; 109:30; 142:7 (implied). For praise/thanksgiving psalms, see: 9:11; 18:49-50; 21:13; 30:12; 63:11; 75:9; 118:28; 145:21. For other types of psalms, see 50:23; 52:9; 107.

<sup>51</sup> For lament/prayer psalms, see: Pss 27:6; 22:25; 54:6; 56:12; 61:8; and Jonah 2:9. For praise/thanksgiving psalms, see: 66:13-15; and 116:17-19. I have understood *vows* as being a promise to engage in some sort of cultic activity, based on 66:13-15 where sacrifices are promised by the voice of that psalm. In all cases, cultic activity is paralleled with verbal praise of YHWH.

<sup>52</sup> 80:18 (communal lament/prayer); 16:7-8; 23:6; 40:6-7 (praise/thanksgiving psalms).

<sup>53</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 67.

<sup>54</sup> Lachish 2, 5, 6; Gen 32:11a [10a] (in prayer); 47:9; Ruth 2:10, 13; 1 Sam 25:41; 2 Sam 7:18 (in prayer); 2 Sam 9:8; 14:22; 1 Kgs 8:13 (in prayer); 2 Kgs 8:13 (but may reflect surprise). See Appendix 1.2.



YHWH to respond favourably to the appeals for deliverance.<sup>55</sup> In effect, as Coetzee also notes, the relationship with God, including praise and trust in God, with the obligations inherent in this relationship, is used to put pressure on God to respond, a conclusion I reached in Section 8.2.1.

The conclusion of Section 8.2.1, that עבד indicates the relationship of the voice in the psalm to YHWH is that of dependency, submission and loyalty, effectively says that the use of עבד in deference to God evokes the derived association of slavery, ‘loyalty’. As discussed in Chapter 3.2, this association is derived from both the associations of slavery, ‘inferior status’ and ‘work’.

### **8.2.3. עבד in relation to psalm genre and the voice in Psalms**

#### **8.2.3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Section 8.2.1 has essentially been a study of the uses of עבד in Psalms in terms of genre. עבד as a title of status correlates with its use in connection with named individuals. עבד as a term of submission and dependency on YHWH correlates with its use as a term of deference before YHWH (circumlocution for ‘I’ or ‘we’) in connection with supplication and also statements of loyalty to YHWH. There is a further correlation of the use of עבד as a term of deference before YHWH with the speaker in the psalms. When עבד relates to the singular or individual voice in the psalm (‘I’), it is done in connection with supplications that include requests for protection or deliverance and the need for help to be loyal to YHWH. It is also found in connection with statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH. However, when עבד relates to the plural voice in the psalm (‘we’), it is done only in connection with requests for YHWH’S favour and there is no connection with statements or claims of loyalty to YHWH. There is also no connection of the use of עבד in the psalms with obligating YHWH to answer the supplications except in Pss 86:12 and 143:12, in which the idea of YHWH’S ownership of the voice/worshipper is emphasised; that is the association of slavery, ‘possession’, is evoked.

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<sup>55</sup> Johan H. Coetzee, ‘Politeness Strategies in the So-called “Enemy Psalms”’: An Inquiry into Israelite Prayer Rhetoric’, in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (JSOTSS 195; eds, S.E. Porter, D.L. Stamps; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 234-235.

### 8.2.3.2. עֲבַד AND PSALM GENRE

My study of the uses of עֲבַד in Psalms can be widened to include the classification of the psalms in which the term appears. Classifying psalms, however, can be problematic, because not only is psalm genre or style considered, but also content. In addition, a number of psalms mix elements of one style or genre with another. Generally scholarship follows the classifications of ‘lament’ (or ‘prayer’), ‘thanksgiving’, ‘praise’ and ‘wisdom’, developed by Gunkel and Mowinckel, all of which can be considered as genre, due to similarities in formal features in the psalms grouped within each classification. Debate on which psalms fit which genre revolves around when a given psalm contains only a few recognised elements of a specific genre, or when a psalm has elements in it from more than one genre. But in addition, other classifications have been developed, most notably ‘royal’, ‘torah’ and ‘psalms of trust’, based on content in a given psalm rather than form. The result is that, especially for the category ‘royal’, psalms that are determined to belong to this category are usually separated out from the genre categories, and the specific genres of the ‘royal’ psalms are frequently not identified.<sup>56</sup> The problem this creates for my study is that in most classification systems, some individual laments/prayer psalms are classified as ‘royal’. This results in splitting such psalms into two categories, each category by default encouraging particular ways of interpreting the psalms contained within them. In light of this situation, I will use the term ‘genre’ when I discuss recognised lament/prayer, praise and thanksgiving psalms; and ‘category’ when I discuss ‘royal’ psalms.

Applying genre and classification considerations to what has been discussed in Section 8.2.1 and presented in Table 2, it is found that those psalms in which עֲבַד is used as a term of deference before YHWH in the context of supplication (Pss 27, 31, 35, 69, 79, 86, 89, 90, 109, 143) are all recognised as ‘laments/prayer psalms’, except for Pss 19 and 119.<sup>57</sup> Despite debate over the genre of Pss 19 and 119,<sup>58</sup> they clearly focus on YHWH’s law and for the

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g. Sabourin, 335; and Broyles, *Psalms*, 20, and Croft, *Identity*, 179-181. Even Gunkel recognised this issue (*The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* [trans. T.M. Horner; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967] 24).

<sup>57</sup> Noted also in H. Ringgren, H. Simian-Yofre, U. Rüterwörden, ‘עֲבַד *‘ābad*; עָבַד *‘ebed*; עֲבָדָה *‘bōdā*’, in *TDOT* (eds. G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry; trans. D.W. Stott; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: 1992 [1986], Vol. 10) 393.

<sup>58</sup> Proposals for genre of Ps 119 are: ‘torah’ (Bullock, Lucas, Mowinckel), ‘wisdom-torah’ (Broyles), ‘wisdom-lament’ (Croft), ‘wisdom’ (Sabourin), ‘hymn-law’ (Weiser), ‘trust’ (Goldingay), and ‘royal’ (Dahood – tentative). Only Croft’s classification of Ps 119 recognises the importance of the many requests as a feature in the psalm. Psalm 19 fares better in classification. It is usually classified as ‘hymn/praise – law’ (Bullock,

purposes of this study will be categorised as ‘Torah psalms’. In their focus on YHWH’s law, Pss 19 and 119 well illustrate how love for YHWH and YHWH’s law are expressed by actions rather than terms such as *חֶסֶד*, *אֱהָב* and *כִּבֵּד*. Despite the especially frequent use of *עֲבַד* as a term of deference before YHWH in Ps 119, this should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the usual genre of psalm in which *עֲבַד* is used in deference is lament/prayer psalms.

The use of *עֲבַד* as a term of deference before YHWH in lament/prayer psalms can be further analysed. The singular *עֲבַדְךָ*, when used as a term of deference before YHWH (= circumlocution for ‘I’) in the context of supplication, occurs only in psalms recognised as individual lament/prayer psalms (Pss 27:9; 31:17[16]; 35:27; 69:18[17]; 86:2, 4, 16; 109:28; 143:2, 12) and Psalms 19 and 119. This means the contexts in which *עֲבַד* deference appears, supplication for deliverance, help to be loyal to YHWH, and statements of loyalty to YHWH, are also restricted to such psalms. That is, individual laments/prayers focus on the situations of the individual. Likewise, the plural *עֲבַדְיָךְ* (= circumlocution for ‘we’), when used in the context of supplication for YHWH’s favour, appears only in psalms recognised as ‘community laments/prayer psalms’ (Pss 79:10; 89:51[50];<sup>59</sup> 90:13, 16<sup>60</sup>). This distinction suggests that Psalms, as a book, recognises that the people of God, as a group, ‘are basically committed to YHWH’,<sup>61</sup> but individuals have more trouble in their commitment to YHWH and in life in general. However, the favours requested of YHWH in connection with the use of *עֲבַד* are ultimately for forgiveness by and restoration to YHWH, for both the individual voice and the plural voice, indicate that ‘the Psalms ... recognise that everyone is a sinner, but they focus more on the importance of the general orientation of one’s life as involving commitment to God than on ... [actions] ... that mar this.’<sup>62</sup> Kidner builds on this idea with his understanding that *עֲבַד* is ‘a convenient pointer to the role of the innocent sufferer’.<sup>63</sup> That is, in line with what is concluded in Section 8.2.1, *עֲבַד* in the ‘lament’ psalms is a term that indicates loyalty to YHWH, and adds to the reasons why YHWH should answer the requests.

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Mowinckel, Weiser), a hymn/praise psalm (Goldingay, Sabourin), ‘torah’ (Lucas), and ‘wisdom/wisdom-torah’ (Dahood, Broyles).

<sup>59</sup> The genre of Ps 89 is in some dispute. Only Mowinckel, Weiser and Broyles consider this psalm to be a community/corporate lament/prayer. This is partly caused by the nature of the psalm (see Broyles, *Psalms*, 355), and that it deals with the king. Most scholars categorise the psalm as ‘royal’ (see also Broyles, *Psalms*, 39, fn.14).

<sup>60</sup> Mowinckel and Weiser classify Ps 90 as a ‘meditative hymn’.

<sup>61</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:64.

<sup>62</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:64. C.f. Mowinckel, *Psalms*, II:12, who notes that in both individual and community ‘laments’, there is a focus on being ‘right’ and ‘guiltless’ rather than on penitence.

<sup>63</sup> Kidner, *Psalms*, 22. This was articulated 35 years before Goldingay’s comment.

In contrast to the use of עֶבֶד as a term of deference before YHWH, most of the other uses of עֶבֶד cannot be correlated to genre or other categories. For the verb form of עֶבֶד, both *YHWH* and *idols* as the object appear in lament/prayer psalms (Pss 106:36 [idols]; 22:31[30]; 102:23[22] [YHWH]) and in hymns/praise psalms (Pss 97:7 [idols]; 100:2 [YHWH]). The same occurs when עֶבֶד as a noun is used for Israel (Pss 79:2; 102:15[14] [lament/prayer]; 105:25; 135:14; 136:22 [praise/hymn]) and when עֶבֶד is used as a title for famous individuals, David included (Pss 78:70; 105:6, 42 [hymn/praise]; 89:4, 40, 51 [3, 39, 50]; 144:10 [lament/prayer]; 132:10 ['royal']). However, the use of עֶבֶד for famous individuals correlates with subject matter: past history (Pss 78, 89, 105, 132). Ps 144 is the exception. There is also a correlation with psalm genre when the verb form of עֶבֶד is used of foreigners in subjection to the Israelite king: this is found only in two 'royal psalms' (Pss 18:44[43]; 72:11). Ps 18 is also commonly recognised as a thanksgiving psalm in genre<sup>64</sup> but Ps 72 is occasionally not categorised as 'royal', despite that it is a prayer for the king.<sup>65</sup> Thus, even the use of עֶבֶד for foreigners in subjection to Israel does not correlate with psalm genre. Consequently, there is no correlation with genre outside of the use of עֶבֶד in deference. However, as just noted, there is a correlation of the use of עֶבֶד as a title for famous individuals with historical subject matter.

### 8.2.3.3. CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that, in the Psalms, only when עֶבֶד is used as a term of deference before YHWH (a circumlocution for 'I' or 'we') is there a clear correlation with psalm genre: lament/prayer psalms and the two Torah psalms, 19 and 119. The term adds to how the voice in each of these psalms constructs itself as a loyal worshipper of YHWH. The differentiation of the contexts of use between individual and plural voice and genre indicates also that when עֶבֶד is used as a term of deference before YHWH in 'community' laments/prayer psalms, the 'we' claim they are faithful to YHWH, even though they may ask for forgiveness for past sins. However, in the 'individual' laments/prayer psalms and the Torah psalms, there is a focus on more 'specific' needs such as help to overcome failure of being loyal to YHWH, as well as the need for deliverance/protection from problems that are associated with unspecified antagonists.

<sup>64</sup> So Bullock, Dahood, Goldingay, Krause (cited in Bullock, *Encountering*, 138-139), Mowinckel, Weiser.

<sup>65</sup> So Goldingay, Krause (cited in Bullock, *Encountering*, 138-139), Mowinckel, Weiser.

There is also a correlation of עבד as a title for individuals with reviews of Israel's history. Outside of these two uses, עבד, in both noun and verb forms, can be treated as an occasional formulaic term that is used to describe Israel, famous past individuals and as a term that carries the meaning, 'to worship'.

#### **8.2.4. עבד and the Speaker in the psalm**

##### **8.2.4.1. THE PROBLEM OF FORMULAIC LANGUAGE IN PSALMS**

The 'specific' needs expressed in connection with עבד in the 'individual laments/prayer psalms' and the nature of these psalms, along with those psalms classified as 'thanksgivings' or 'psalms of trust', which are usually thought to be sub-categories of lament/prayer,<sup>66</sup> can lead to the impression that they arose 'out of the experiences of an individual poet, and in that sense to be primarily autobiographical.'<sup>67</sup> This has been how these psalms have been interpreted from early times up to the early twentieth century (including Gunkel), shown for the former by the addition of the ascription, *of David* (לדוד), to many psalms.<sup>68</sup> It is now commonly assumed that these ascriptions are a later addition to the psalms to which they are attached. This view is helped by additional psalms in the LXX that have this ascription, the lack of clear historical references within those psalms that contain this ascription along with references to events in David's life, and apparent contradictions between the style of composition and the historical event in the ascription of some psalms (e.g. Ps 34 – an alphabet acrostic but with a title that indicates severe distress).<sup>69</sup> Of interest is that, with the exception of Ps 119, all psalms in which עבדך is used as deference in connection with the 'I' voice are ascribed as לדוד. Whatever the reason why לדוד was attached to these psalms, the combination

<sup>66</sup> For 'thanksgiving Psalms' recognised as a form of 'lament/prayer psalm', see Bullock, *Encountering*, 149; Lucas, *Exploring*, 5; Sabourin, *Psalms*, 277, 323; Weiser, *Psalms*, 83; Broyles, *Psalms*, 19; J.L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 82. Some prefer to view them as a form of 'hymn/praise psalm' (Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:55; Dahood, *Psalms*). Similarly, for 'psalms of trust/confidence' as a form of the 'lament/ prayer psalm', see Bullock, *Encountering*, 149; Crenshaw, *Psalms*, 82; Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:65; Sabourin, *Psalms*, 264, 320; Broyles, *Psalms*, 16. In both cases, the form is similar to the 'lament/ prayer psalm,' except that thanks or trust is emphasised respectively.

<sup>67</sup> Lucas, *Exploring*, 11. C.f. Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:24: many psalms 'talk as if they arise out of concrete events'.

<sup>68</sup> Lucas, *Exploring*, 11-12.

<sup>69</sup> For recent discussion and overviews, see, e.g. Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:25-30; Broyles, *Psalms*, 26-31; Eaton, *Psalms*, 6-7 (affirming some Davidic authorship). For an older defence of Davidic authorship for some of the *of David* psalms, see Kidner, *Psalms*, 33-35, 43-46. Margaret Daly-Denton, 'David the Psalmist, Inspired Prophet: Jewish Antecedents of the New Testament Datum', *ABR* 53 (2004) 32-47, understands this, and the composition of later extra-biblical psalms, to be a result of Jews in the Second Temple period desiring to portray David as a prophet, which is taken up in the New Testament.

of עֲבָד deference and the singular voice indicate that these psalms are of relevance to individuals and their needs: for help against adversaries, help to overcome their own failings, and their need for YHWH to favour them.

In the second half of the twentieth century, scholars have increasingly interpreted the ‘specifics’ of supplications in the laments, especially in the individual lament/prayer psalms, as being formulaic in nature and therefore not describing real situations. Gunkel and Mowinckel (who built on Gunkel) pioneered this view,<sup>70</sup> arguing that the forms of the psalms originated in Israel’s worship. This argument is accepted by much recent scholarship,<sup>71</sup> and has been given theoretical foundations by Ljung, Birkeland and Broyles.<sup>72</sup> It has arisen partly because form-criticism has been unable to recover the historical situations that lie behind the relevant psalms.<sup>73</sup>

Despite this trend of increasingly recognising that the supplications in the psalms are formulaic, it has not stopped scholarship still speculating that many psalms witness to real situations. Mowinckel argued that the royal psalms and enthronement/YHWH’s kingship psalms, as well as the laments/prayer psalms, reflect the existence of an annual enthronement-of-God ritual, a view that has remained popular.<sup>74</sup> The problem here is that there is no other biblical evidence of such a ritual: texts from Mesopotamia form the basis of this view.<sup>75</sup> Gunkel argued that individual lament/prayer psalms were written by individuals not

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<sup>70</sup> Gunkel, *Psalms*, 5, 20; Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:1-41. C.f. Goldingay, *Psalms* I:46.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. Weiser, *Psalms*, 67, 79-80; Broyles, *Psalms*, 13, 62, 241; Sabourin, *Psalms*, 216; Lucas, *Exploring*, 4; Alter, *Psalms*, xxiv-xxv; implied in Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:64, 74. This is essentially Gunkel’s thesis in his discussion about the authorship of the psalms.

<sup>72</sup> I. Ljung, *Tradition and Interpretation: A Study of the Use and Application of Formulaic Language in the so-called Ebed YHWH-psalms* (Coniectanea Biblica; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978); Birkeland, *Die Feinde des Individuums in der israelitischen Psalmenliteratur* (Oslo, 1933); C.C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms* (JSOTSS 52; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988).

<sup>73</sup> C.f. comments in Goldingay, *Psalms*, 46; Alter, *Psalms*, xv; c.f. Weiser, *Psalms*, 35; Eaton, *Kingship*, 22. For Ps 119 alone, see Davidson, *Vitality*, 388: dates range from ‘the seventh to the third century BCE,’ and suggestions for the author include: young man, old man, prisoner, king, wisdom teacher, and priest; c.f. Eaton, *Psalms*, 415.

<sup>74</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:140-183 and Croft, *Identity*, 89-112 (kingship renewal in combination with YHWH enthronement); Eaton, *Kingship*, 25; *Psalms*, 23-24; and A.R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967) 54-136 (similar, but with a royal humiliation component in the ritual, similar to that in Babylon); Weiser, *Psalms*, 27-52 (covenant renewal). However, as for form criticism’s wider problem in dating and determining historical situations behind the psalms (see footnote above), the attempt to find a specific festival to which many psalms are related is also a failure (c.f. Goldingay, *Psalms*, I: 54). Croft, *Identity*, 84, and Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 58, also acknowledge the difficulty in finding biblical texts that witness to any such festivals.

<sup>75</sup> See Goldingay, *Psalms*, I: 54, Croft, *Identity*, 84, and Johnson, *Sacral Kingship*, 58,

connected with the temple. Obviously, where a psalm can be assigned to an individual, who, for example, is sick and fears he/she will die, one would expect illness and death terminology to appear in the psalm.<sup>76</sup> Yet, in many of laments/prayer psalms, the language of *enemies*, *adversaries* and *the wicked* appears (e.g. Pss 6, 30, 39, 91, 102). It is features such as this juxtaposing of illness and adversaries terminology, along with the change of mood at the end of these psalms, which makes it difficult to recover any historical situation to which the psalm may bear witness.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, such language is general, which allows the psalms to be relevant for a number of situations that worshippers may face.<sup>78</sup> It is emotional, not factual, language. Even the conservative scholar Kidner, who argues that Ps 52 was written because of the event mentioned in the ascription connected with that psalm, can say that ‘the psalm looks beyond the individual [in the ascription] to the way of life he represents’.<sup>79</sup>

That the language in the lament/prayer, thanksgiving and trust psalms is formulaic is indicated by the presence in Pss 119 of the motifs of affliction, persecution, complaint, and frequent supplication.<sup>80</sup> The same occurs on a lesser scale in Ps 19:11-14.<sup>81</sup> The length of Ps 119, its eight verse alphabetic acrostic format, which forces the material not necessarily to have a logical progression, and its focus on YHWH’s torah, works against it being composed for a specific situation.<sup>82</sup> It is noteworthy that even the content of YHWH’s torah is not specified.<sup>83</sup> Rather, as is usually recognised, it is a meditation on guidance provided by that torah.<sup>84</sup> That is, Ps 119 puts together a number of formulaic motifs that indicate loyalty to YHWH (which includes עֲבָדָה deference and its connection with supplication and loyalty), yet in such a way that those who use this psalm will see their own situations reflected in it, and so recognise the psalm speaks to them. The same is true for Ps 19, as it moves from the glories of creation and the benefits of YHWH’s torah to a recognition of human sin, located both within the voice of

<sup>76</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 16.

<sup>77</sup> C.f. Weiser, *Psalms*, 67, 79-80. These terms form the starting point for Croft’s analysis of the ‘I’ voice psalms.

<sup>78</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 18; c.f. Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:74 (for what the language of *death* can relate to). Alter, xxiv-xxviii, shows how imagery and language can speak to people even across cultures and across the centuries. This is also a major concern of Croft who emphasises that the terms, *enemies*, *poor* and *needy* can be used for a number of situations (*Identity*, 17-72).

<sup>79</sup> Kidner, *Psalms*, 45.

<sup>80</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 444. C.f. Davidson, *Vitality*, 388.

<sup>81</sup> C.f. Davidson, *Vitality*, 389.

<sup>82</sup> Davidson, *Vitality*, 391-392, argues that vv.17-24 are an ‘urgent prayer for help’ and reflect real situations of ‘hatred and scorn’. But this is in contrast to his comment on p.388 that Ps 119 incorporates a variety of material. See also Bullock, *Encountering*, 222, on vv.61-62.

<sup>83</sup> Noted by Eaton, *Psalms*, 415-416.

<sup>84</sup> Eaton, *Psalms*, 416, however, argues Ps 119 is ‘a great prayer for help.’

the psalm (therefore the worshipper who uses the psalm; vv.12, 14) and in other people (v.13).<sup>85</sup>

Even when prayers in the Bible are set in other contexts, they can be formulaic in style. For example, Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam 2:1-10<sup>86</sup> (a thanksgiving) uses imagery of herself and YHWH surrounded by *the wicked* and *adversaries* (2:9-10), and includes imagery of the poor and the wealthy (2:4-8). However, the context (1 Sam 1) shows that the enemies are only one person—Hannah's rival, 'not life-threatening militants'<sup>87</sup>—and Hannah herself is not an oppressed poor person—her husband has some wealth: he can support two wives! Yet the prayer itself, despite its formulaic expressions, also includes the specifics of Hannah's situation: childlessness and ostracism (2:3, 5; see 1:6). Jonah 2:2-9<sup>88</sup> also uses formulaic language, such as: *Sheol, called to YHWH out of my distress*, dangerous water (c.f. Ps 69:3), *pit*, and vows. However, the prayer is also related to its context: Jonah under water; Jonah in the fish (vv.3, 5); and there are no references to adversaries, which is the case for the narrative. The use of the two prayers in their contexts shows how generalised and formulaic language can relate to specific situations, and also give an idea as to how the ancient Hebrews spoke their situations to God: they used extreme language. This use of language remained in Jewish consciousness into the New Testament period, shown in the song ascribed to Mary in Luke 1:46-55 (Mary 'identifies' herself with the righteous poor and the oppressed), and the prayer of the early church leaders in Acts 4:23-30 (*Gentiles, all Israel* and *Pilate* 'opposed'

<sup>85</sup> Goldingay, 294; Davidson, 73; c.f. Alter, 63.

<sup>86</sup> Scholars debate whether the prayer is original with the story or added later. It is virtually agreed that the prayer was, or based on, a pre-existing prayer. For the prayer being early, traditional, yet part of the story, see Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 70 [Hannah adapted a Shiloh song]; Mary J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NIBC; Peabody, Carlisle: Hendrickson, Paternoster, 2000) 22; Peter C. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 30. For the prayer being a later incorporation into the narrative from the monarchic era, see Eaton *Kingship*, 10-11; Hans W. Hertzberg, *I&II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1964) 29-31; Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1990) 17; P. Kyle McCarter, *1 Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 8; Garden City: Doubleday, 1980) 75. John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971) 51 argues that 1 Sam 2:1-5 represents 'an authentic kernel,' but the whole prayer is a later expansion and insertion into its present context.

<sup>87</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> As for 1 Sam 2:1-10, Jonah 2:1-9 is also debated as to whether it is original with the story or added later. A number of commentators on Jonah now recognise that the prayer is original to the story, but still debate whether it is an original composition (by Jonah or the Book's compiler), or has drawn upon pre-existing material such as the Psalms. See, e.g. Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 181-185; D.L. Christensen, 'Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah,' in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSS 40; ed., E.R. Follis; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987) 45; Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament Vol 4: The Prophets* (London: SPCK, 2002) 187; D. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC 31; Waco: Word, 1987) 438-440.



Jesus, but the situation is only that of opposition from the Jewish leadership to two apostles, Peter and John; Acts 4:1, 5).

Pss 19 and 119, along with 1 Sam 2:1-10 and Jonah 2:2-9 indicate that much language in the prayer/lament and thanksgiving psalms is formulaic. Essentially, it is language that describes a contrast between the voice in the psalm and those that oppose it. The language is designed ‘so as to include every possible distress’.<sup>89</sup> The effect is that the lament/prayer, thanksgiving and ‘trust’ psalms speak to people who are or wish to be loyal to YHWH, and face real or potential trouble from those who are not.

#### 8.2.4.2. ATTEMPTS TO DETERMINE THE ‘I’ VOICE IN PSALMS

Because of the formulaic nature of the language in the lament/prayer, thanksgiving and ‘trust’ psalms, it becomes difficult to determine who the voice represents in these psalms. Sabourin comments, ‘... It has never been proved convincingly that in so many cases the psalmist speaking in the I-form is in reality the king or a leader of the people representing the community and expressing its collective interests.’<sup>90</sup> Goldingay, more recently, comments similarly that it is hard ‘to distinguish between psalms prayed by individuals and psalms prayed by the community’, and ‘... the mere use of “I” or “we” may not tell us which prayers belong to an individual or a leader and which belongs to a community.’ He cites Num 20:14-21 in the ASV to show how the speaking voice in a request moves easily from the plural to the singular, ‘yet it is the same people who speak throughout’.<sup>91</sup> The same unity of ‘I’ and ‘we’ is also found in Pss 9-10, 22, 44, 60, 66, 75 and 102.<sup>92</sup>

However, despite this difficulty, attempts continue to be made to determine the identity of the speaking voice in the psalms (including Goldingay). Systematic attempts to do this are provided by Mowinckel, Eaton and Croft, with more summary attempts by Broyles and Goldingay.

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<sup>89</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 13, c.f. p.18.

<sup>90</sup> Sabourin, *Psalms*, 296.

<sup>91</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:59 (quotes), 60. The swapping of plural and singular for Israel as the speaking voice occurs most notably in v.19. See Chapter 5.2 above for how the language relates to polite expression and the portrayal of Israel and Edom as nations.

<sup>92</sup> Eaton, *Kingship*, 23.

#### 8.2.4.2.1. Mowinckel

Mowinckel starts with the thesis that, ‘the basic reality in human life, is for the Israelite, not the individual, but the community’, derived from cultural anthropological studies.<sup>93</sup> From this thesis, Mowinckel first argues that speaking in the ‘I’ voice was, for ancient Israel and the ancient world, the normal way of speaking for the group ‘because there it is the whole and not the individual that is given reality, a “corporate personality” which may act through a representative personality who “incorporates” the whole’. This is shown in particular by Babylonian hymns in which the king speaks as an ‘I’, yet on behalf of the nation.<sup>94</sup> Using Birkeland, Mowinckel understands the ‘I’ psalms to be similar to the Babylonian hymns; that is, there are ‘I-form’ psalms that are in reality congregational psalms, ‘because the ‘I’ is the national and cultic representative of the congregation.’<sup>95</sup> One ramification of this argument is that when psalms are written in the ‘we-form’, they are later; that is, Israel, over time, gradually developed ‘a more individualising and differentiating way of thinking: the totality as a sum of independent units.’<sup>96</sup> Second, Mowinckel argues that ‘in all important situations the paterfamilias, the chief, or the king, represents the whole’. The whole is concentrated in the leader, and all others in the community ‘participate dynamically in what he represents’. Consequently, the king is representative of the whole.<sup>97</sup>

Putting together the two arguments, Mowinckel argues that the king was the ‘representative personality in the royal Temple in Jerusalem’, and so community psalms in the ‘I’ voice were written to be spoken or sung by the king on behalf of himself and the nation.<sup>98</sup>

Mowinckel also acknowledges that there are real ‘private persons’ psalms, and devotes considerable study to those psalms he understands fall into this category.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, Mowinckel has to determine which ‘I-voice’ psalms are community psalms (i.e. written for the king) or psalms written for individuals. Mowinckel acknowledges this is difficult to do<sup>100</sup> but it does not stop him trying. Clues that suggest an ‘I’ psalm is a community psalm, and

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<sup>93</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:42.

<sup>94</sup> Birkeland, *Die Feinde*, 39, cited in Mowinckel I:39.

<sup>95</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:38-39, 45.

<sup>96</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:45, c.f. p.60.

<sup>97</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:43-44.

<sup>98</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:46, 76-78.

<sup>99</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:38, 39, 46; II:1-25.

<sup>100</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:78; II: 16-18.

therefore spoken by/for the king on behalf of the people are: war pictures; ‘the peoples’; ‘peoples and kings’; ‘all the nations’; and ‘servant’ of YHWH. In his listing of psalms that are ‘National Psalms of Lamentation in the I-form’, psalms that use עֶבֶד as a term of deference are Pss 27, 35 and 69.<sup>101</sup> Clues that suggest an ‘I’ psalm is a personal (private) psalm of lament, and therefore spoken by/for any individual, are: language that relates to illness with a connection to sin; evil forces; and ‘performance utterance curses’.<sup>102</sup> Mowinckel does not give a complete listing of which psalms he classifies as ‘personal (private) psalm of lament’. But for those he lists, psalms that use עֶבֶד as a term of deference are Pss 34 and 116.

In effect, Mowinckel classifies as ‘community laments’ those ‘I-voice’ psalms that include the motifs of war, foreigners/nations, and ‘servant’ of YHWH. Of these motifs, ‘servant’ of YHWH is not a strong contender. First, as noted above, only three psalms in Mowinckel’s list of ‘I-voice’ community psalms use the term. Given his recognition that kings in the ANE regularly called themselves ‘servant’ of various gods,<sup>103</sup> if the king is truly the voice in these psalms, the use of עֶבֶד might be expected to be more frequent. Second, also noted above, עֶבֶד as deference appears in two ‘private’ thanksgiving psalms.<sup>104</sup> That is, in Mowinckel’s classification system, עֶבֶד is not a term used solely for the king.

#### 8.2.4.2.2. Eaton

Eaton, in *Kingship and the Psalms*, argues that most psalms relate to the king, whether in the ‘I’ voice or not. He critiques scholarship up to the time of writing (1976), focussing especially on Gunkel, Mowinckel and Birkeland. Most of his criticism relates to where they argue that

<sup>101</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:225-227.

<sup>102</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, II:2-11.

<sup>103</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, I:56, fn.42. See Frankfort, *Kingship*, 10 (Babylon, Assyria), 240-242, 248, 254 (Assyria); O.R. Gurney, ‘Hittite Kingship’, in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958) 121 (Hittite); J. Baines, ‘Ancient Egyptian Kingship: Official Forms, Rhetoric, Context’, in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceeding of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSS 270; ed. J. Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) 27-28 (Egyptian). See also W.G. Lambert, ‘Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia’, in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSS 270; ed. J. Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 53-70; John Day, ‘The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy’, in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSS 270; ed. J. Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 86-87 (Canaanite); Moshe Weinfeld, ‘The King as Servant’, *JJS* 33 (1982) 189-194; and Kieth W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSS 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979).

<sup>104</sup> Mowinckel, *Psalms*, II:31-43.

some 'I' voice psalms do not concern the Israelite king.<sup>105</sup> However, even as he critiques them, he affirms those motifs in Psalms they use as proofs that various 'I' psalms are royal and adds them to others he also thinks refer to the king. Essentially these motifs fall into categories such as national focus (e.g. nations, armies, Israel as *my people*), the voice's relationship with God (e.g. God's son, God's servant, God and the speaker's honour bound together, God as *my God*), over-the-top language (e.g. the speaker invokes world judgement, super-abundant life, deliverance of the speaker has vast consequences), exaltation of the voice (e.g. head raised, glory, God's right hand), and piety ('righteous one' language, vows, assurance of prayer being heard). Eaton's unique contribution to the list of 'proofs' for royal psalms is his categories of exaltation and piety, God's helping the psalm's voice, and awareness that God is frequently portrayed as a king.<sup>106</sup> With these proofs, nearly every psalm becomes a 'royal psalm.' For the 'I' voice psalms, Eaton argues that the voice is that of the king.

In relation to עבד in Psalms, Eaton, like Mowinckel, understands the term to refer exclusively to the king.<sup>107</sup> The problem with this is that people other than David or the Davidic king have עבד used of them (105:6, 26, 42) and in a similar fashion as for David in Pss 78:70 and 89:4, 21 [3, 20]: chosen by YHWH. Clearly עבדך refers to the king in Ps 89:40[39] and 51[50] (if עבדך in the MT and LXX is read as עבדך), but to say עבדך automatically applies to the king in other 'I' voice psalms can only be established if Eaton's other proofs can hold good for those psalms. Furthermore, if nearly all psalms are indeed royal, then there would be a greater use of עבד in Psalms than what occurs, given Eaton's comment about the role of the king in the societies of the time.<sup>108</sup>

#### 8.2.4.2.3. Croft

Croft's monograph, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms*, essentially refines Mowinckel's scheme to determine which 'I' psalms relate to the king. Croft's approach is to define what motifs in 'I-voice' psalms relate to the king, the nation, or to individuals. This

<sup>105</sup> Eaton, *Kingship*, 1-18.

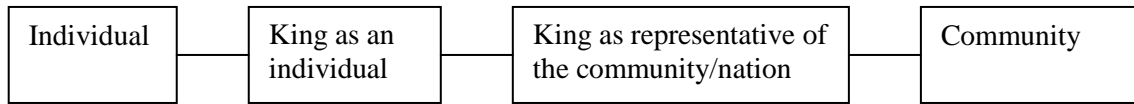
<sup>106</sup> Eaton, *Kingship*, 23-24.

<sup>107</sup> See Eaton, *Kingship*, 149-150. Part of Eaton's argument is to show that עבד is paralleled with *chosen*, especially when he discusses David as God's עבד.

<sup>108</sup> C.f. Mowinckel and fn.102.

allows him to place the relevant psalms on a continuum or axis that moves from the individual, the king as an individual, the king as representative of the community/nation, to the community.

**Fig 1 – Croft’s axis for the ‘I’ Psalms**



Croft starts with a study of the terminology in the ‘I-voice’ psalms of *enemies*, *the wicked*, *poor* and *needy*, to conclude that this language can reflect real situation, reflects ritual, or is simply formulaic.<sup>109</sup> Second, Croft looks at other formulaic language to determine, like Mowinckel, which ‘I-voice’ psalms were written for the king and which were written for private persons. For the former, Croft uses a wider range of terms and envisaged situations in the psalms, such as: ‘situations of war and battle, prayers to rule justly, prayers against treachery and prayers to be tests’; and ‘royal style’ (the use of divine epithets to which the first person singular suffix is attached [e.g. *my God*, *my Lord*, *my Fortress*, etc]).<sup>110</sup> Croft also consistently interprets the verb in relation to YHWH, *arise*, as a term that indicates the psalm was used for an annual kingship ritual as part of a major festival. Crofts’ thesis is that the ‘I’ in the ‘I-voice’ psalms relates to individuals, not the group, in contrast to Mowinckel and Birkeland; yet, in keeping with Mowinckel, many are for the Israelite king, of which some are for an annual kingship festival. Croft also recognises that some ‘I-voice’ psalms are spoken by a cultic representative on behalf of the community, or a teacher. Croft does not discuss any cultural implications of using the singular or plural voice; he simply argues that ‘I’ refers to an individual and ‘we’ to a group. He is highly critical of both Mowinckel and Birkeland’s views that the ‘I-voice’ psalms are modelled on the Babylonian kinship hymns, yet recognises, from scholarship, that the kings in the ANE played a prominent role in religious rituals.<sup>111</sup> This results in his one off comment that Ps 69 is ‘the prayer of a king made in the pronounced royal style of the ancient Near East by which the sufferings of the nation are portrayed as the sufferings of the monarch himself’.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Croft, *Identity*, 20-69.

<sup>110</sup> Croft, *Identity*, 76, 77-80; see chart on p.78.

<sup>111</sup> Croft, *Identity*, 85-88, 75.

<sup>112</sup> Croft, *Identity*, 118.

As a result of his analysis, Croft assigns half of the ‘I-voice’ psalms as royal psalms, of which 30 relate to historical events (e.g. prayer before battles, prayers when the king is sick or faces treachery), and 20 to an annual kingship festival. Eighteen relate to the private individual. Thirty three psalms carry the voice of a ‘cultic minister’, of which Croft includes wisdom teachers.<sup>113</sup>

Croft’s analysis allows more psalms that use עַבְדְּךָ (*your servant*) (Pss 27, 31, 69, 116, 143) to be put into the category of ‘royal psalms’ than Mowinckel’s analysis, but less than Eaton’s. That is, a stronger case than Mowinckel’s has effectively been made that allows עַבְד to be seen as a term that relates to the king.<sup>114</sup> However, as noted for Mowinckel, עַבְד also appears in Croft’s other categories of ‘I’ voice psalms: Pss 86 and 109 are ‘private person’ psalms; Pss 19 and 119 are both considered to reflect the voice of ‘the individual as a cultic minister’. That is, once again, עַבְד is a term that is not solely used for the king as a title in relation to YHWH, recognised by Croft himself.<sup>115</sup> All three contexts are in keeping with ANE metaphorical usages of ‘servant’ in relation to deity, noted in Section 8.2.1: king, temple staff and worshippers.<sup>116</sup>

In Croft’s argument is a desire to avoid determining the use of a term in a few psalms and then applying it to all psalms.<sup>117</sup> His wish is that the context within which terms are found should guide the interpretation of the meaning and role of those terms. However, despite this effort, certain motifs are used in a consistent way that result in his thinking that the voice in a given ‘I-voice’ psalm is the king: references to Israel; references to the nations; *enemies* as enemies of Israel; and the call to YHWH, *arise*. Such motifs, except for *arise*, are also used by others to suggest the relevant psalms are for the king or are community in orientation.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>113</sup> See Croft, *Identity*, 179-181 for a convenient listing.

<sup>114</sup> Ps 144:10, with its use of *your servant David* as a circumlocution for the voice in the psalm (see earlier), also supports this interpretation.

<sup>115</sup> Croft, *Identity*, 77.

<sup>116</sup> See Section 8.2.1, fn.29 and Bridge, ‘Enslaved,’ 2-3.

<sup>117</sup> Croft, *Identity*, 48, 53-55, 71

<sup>118</sup> C.f. Broyles, *Psalms*, 16, 39, fns 12, 13. Lucas, 4-7 notes for some ‘I-voice’ psalms the topics of defeat and famine, and changes to the plural (e.g. Pss 18, 118). These suggest a leader or representative is praying. Dahood, *Psalms*, I:28, 249; II:23 and in other pages, argues on the basis of references to Israel or to the nations that Pss 28, 41, 54, 102 and 138 are royal. See also Bullock, *Encountering*, 52-55, for Pss 89 and 51, on the basis of concerns in reference to Israel or Jerusalem.

However, given Croft's arguments, there is no reason why a reference to 'Israel' or enemies as Israel's enemies has to require automatically the interpretation that the voice in the psalm is that of the king. It could be that the voice/psalmist sees his situation as part of the ongoing situation that the nation/community faces or is simply using traditional language (see Section 8.2.4.2.4 below), a possibility that Croft himself acknowledges when he discusses specific terms, and a possibility also mooted by Gunkel.<sup>119</sup> Bullock also suggests that the compiler of the Psalms has placed psalms for (private) individuals (e.g. Ps 82) in such a way in the Book that they address corporate concerns.<sup>120</sup> What Bullock indicates is essentially Goldingay's contention: the voice in the psalm, or even the voices in the psalms (where there are multiple voices,<sup>121</sup> or changes from singular to plural, or 'I' to 'him'), have to be interpreted on a case-by-case basis (see Section 8.2.4.2.5), something to which Croft would agree.

#### 8.2.4.2.4. Broyles

Broyles, in *Psalms*, only gives a summary discussion on who is the voice in the 'I-voice' psalms. Like Croft, he recognises that prayer/lament psalms which contain 'corporate concerns', such as urban unrest, foreign peoples, or Israel as a whole (e.g. Pss 59, 64, 77, 102, 144) are spoken by a representative figure.<sup>122</sup> His discussion in *Conflict*, that language in the prayer/lament psalms is formulaic, also allows him to make comments such as for Ps 144: 'People pray for deliverance from foreigners after the style of the old royal psalms.'<sup>123</sup> That is, the language of the individual lament/prayer psalms can be used for corporate prayer. For example, Broyles notes that military attack is simply one of a number of images of threat that 'paint in familiar strokes scenes that evoke the general psychological and spiritual predicaments that worshippers may face (in the manner of a poem).'<sup>124</sup>

Ultimately, Broyles argues that most 'I-voice' psalms were spoken by a 'liturgist', who often acted in a representative capacity. In a few cases, Broyles thinks the king may be the representative. This is borne out in *Psalms* as he introduces each psalm (e.g. Ps 18; 44;

<sup>119</sup> E.g. Croft, *Identity*, 71, in his discussion on *the poor*. Gunkel, *Psalms*, 35.

<sup>120</sup> Bullock, *Encountering*, 45. Bullock argues this for Pss 73-89 (Book 3 in Psalms).

<sup>121</sup> E.g. Pss 28, 44, 60, 66, 94, 123.

<sup>122</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 16, 39, fns 12, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 501; c.f. *Conflict*: 19, 24

<sup>124</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 18. C.f. my discussion above on the prayers in 1 Sam 2; Jon 2; Lk 1; Acts 5.

101).<sup>125</sup> However, for those psalms in which עֶבֶד occurs, Broyles either does not discuss the voice of the psalm (e.g. Pss 90, 34, 35, 86, 90), or says the voice is that of an unspecified individual (Pss 69, 116). This indicates that Broyles does not consider עֶבֶד, when used as a term of deference before YHWH, to be a term connected with the king.

Broyles does not use any systematic categorisation to assist with his determination of the voice in the 'I-voice' psalms. This allows him to 'break' his own recognition that the mention of foreign peoples in a psalm means that that psalm has a community focus. For example, when he discusses the term, *the peoples* (עַמִּים), in Ps 56:7, he makes the comment, 'it is more characteristic for an individual prayer psalm to refer to the nations simply as part of the wider tradition of Yahweh's judgement.'<sup>126</sup> That is, the mention of a 'corporate' concern does not necessarily mean that the voice in the psalm is speaking on behalf of the nation. Broyles can do this under the interpretation that 'peoples' and 'nations' represent outsiders.<sup>127</sup> Such an interpretation argues that not only is terminology such as 'nations/peoples' formulaic, but it is also extreme language. Like Bullock, Broyles also considers some psalms (e.g. Pss 69, 77) were originally meant for private individuals, but after the exile, the 'I' in such psalms became a representative voice.<sup>128</sup>

#### 8.2.4.2.5. Goldingay

Goldingay's thesis is similar to that of Mowinckel's: on the whole, the psalms are related to the corporate worship of ancient Israel. However, like Gunkel, Goldingay asserts that 'the Psalms also assume that spirituality is an individual matter'.<sup>129</sup> In a similar fashion to Croft, he classifies the 'I-voice' prayer/lament psalms as being of the individual, of the leader, and of the congregation. As has already been noted above, Goldingay recognises that such a classification is difficult to do, and so he remains tentative. As has also been noted above, he shows from elsewhere in the Bible that the first person and third person can be swapped in

<sup>125</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 107, 200, 388-309.

<sup>126</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 241.

<sup>127</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 242. Unfortunately Broyles in *Conflict* did not discuss any criteria to determine which psalms are 'community' or 'individual'.

<sup>128</sup> Broyles, *Psalms*, 286, 314.

<sup>129</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:46-47, 59.



speaking. Consequently he can say that the change between singular and plural first person in a psalm may only mean ‘that the way of speaking changes’.<sup>130</sup>

Goldingay’s argument is brief and does not set out the grounds as to why he classifies the ‘I-voice’ prayer psalms as he does. This is left to the commentary proper, in which he does not tie his comments on each psalm to his scheme. However, in his scheme, he only includes two psalms that use עבדך in relation to YHWH as prayer/lament psalms: Pss 86 and 143. The former is classified as ‘of an individual’, and the latter ‘of a leader’. Once again, there is recognition that עבד is a term which is not used solely for the king, a fact he notes in his discussion on the use of עבד in Ps 19.<sup>131</sup>

#### 8.2.4.2.6. Others

In his brief argument in *The Psalms* that the ‘I-voice’ psalms are the composition of or for individuals, Gunkel’s criteria for *not* being ‘songs of the individual’ are: intense suffering expressed, clear indications where corporate concerns are expressed, and when the context demands it. His drawing attention to ‘I-voice’ prayers in Jeremiah, Job, Hannah, Jonah and Hezekiah serves to show that any corporate motifs that are present in these prayers are set in the context of the individual, not the nation or community.<sup>132</sup>

Dahood focuses little on the ‘I-voice’ in the psalms. He usually discusses it only when he is convinced, more or less, that a given psalm is a royal psalm. Consequently, he is inconsistent in his use of clues put forward to say that the ‘I’ voice is the king’s voice. For example, he states that the ‘I’ in Pss 28, 41, 58, 56, 61, 63, 75, 86, 89 is that of the king or other leader. Of these psalms, only Ps 86 contains עבדך. For this psalm, he comments that the psalm reflects the *your servant* and *my lord* language in the El Amarna royal correspondence and in the Ugaritic letters of kings, therefore the psalm is royal.<sup>133</sup> Yet, if this is so, why is it that Dahood does not classify as ‘royal’ other psalms that use עבדך? Furthermore, most others (e.g.

<sup>130</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:59-60, 60. c.f. Eaton, *Kingship*, 23, who argues that when both ‘I’ and ‘we’ are used in a psalm, the ‘representative character of the king’ best fits this change in voice.

<sup>131</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, I:294.

<sup>132</sup> Gunkel, *Psalms*, 16. For detail, see H. Gunkel, J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttinger Handkommentar; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933).

<sup>133</sup> Dahood, *Psalms*, II:292

Broyles, Croft, Goldingay, Lucas, Sabourin, Weiser) classify Ps 86 as an individual prayer/lament.

Bullock has already been noted above (Section 8.2.4.2.3) for his suggestion that a further and important factor needs to be included when determining who the 'I' in the psalms is: editorial placing.<sup>134</sup> That is, a psalm in the 'I' voice and originally written to apply to private individuals, could have been placed in the Psalms where they are to be used by the community in a later time than when the psalm was written. The effect of this comment is to indicate once again the near impossibility of determining exactly the voice in many of the 'I' psalms. Bullock does not discuss the use of עבד.

### 8.2.4.3. CONCLUSIONS

The attempt to determine who the 'I' voice is in a psalm tends to focus on three possibilities: the king, a representative of the worshipping group/community, or a 'private' individual. A variety of clues are offered to assist this determination. The difficulty is deciding which clues are relevant for the 'private' individual and which are relevant for a leader of the group or the Israelite nation. This is not helped by the awareness that psalms that were possibly written for the king have become 'democratised' for individuals in the post-exilic period, or that psalms written for private individuals have been used later by the community.

Generally, those who say the 'I' voice in a psalm is that of the king or other leader do so on the basis of the appearance in the psalm of motifs of war, other peoples or nations, the kings of the nations, or Israel as a nation (e.g. Mowinckel, Eaton, Croft, Broyles). This can be summarised under the theme, 'corporate concern' (terminology used by Gunkel and Broyles). These clues seem to be accepted by most.

Other clues that are sometimes used to say the 'I' voice in a psalm is that of the king or representative leader are: the voice's personal relationship with YHWH (e.g. *my God*, etc.); the use of עבדך in relation to YHWH; and exaggerated language (e.g. the results and implications of victory, exaltation, or the intensity of suffering; e.g. Gunkel, Birkeland,

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<sup>134</sup> See fn.120 above.

Eaton). Here, however, there is subjectivism in interpretation. These clues can be equally argued as applying to the private person, which occur in this fashion in 1 Sam 2:1-10, Jonah 2:2-9, and in the New Testament in Luke 1:46-55. With regard to עַבְדִּי/עַבְדְּךָ, it is not a term used exclusively for the king, despite Mowinckel, Birkeland and Eaton's arguments. It can be used for the king, but Psalms also witnesses it being used of other persons, and it is found in psalms that are considered by many not to be royal. This is in line with the rest of the Hebrew Bible, in which as shown in Chapter 4.2.12, non-royal characters use master-slave servant in prayer (e.g. Gen 32:11[10]; Ex 4:10; Judg 15:18; 1 Sam 3:9; Neh 1:6; Dan 10:17; 1 Sam 1:11 [אַמְתִּי]).<sup>135</sup> The same is the case for the motif of enemies/adversaries in Psalms. This motif can only be used to say the 'I' voice in a psalm is that of the king if it can be proved, from other clues, that its use refers to the king's enemies and/or Israel's enemies (e.g. Croft, Eaton, Dahood). As is discussed in Chapter 9.2.2, only two kings are designated as עַבְדִּי of God: David and Hezekiah, which suggests that 'servant' as part of royal ideology was not prominent in ancient Israel in comparison to the ancient Near East.<sup>136</sup> When it was used, it was reserved for those kings who are viewed as the most faithful of all Israelite kings to God.

Despite the difficulty in determining who the 'I' voice is in a given psalm, it is clear that some psalms speak in the voice of the king (e.g. Ps 18, 89, 132, 144). Motifs of subduing peoples (or Israel), victory, the voice as *your anointed* in relation to YHWH, and/or YHWH's care for the king (in the name, David) are prominent in these psalms. Unless such clues exist in a psalm, it is near impossible to say unequivocally whether the 'I' voice in that psalm is that of the king. There are simply too many other factors that come into play, including how emotion is expressed and the relationship of the individual to the community.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>135</sup> See Chapter 4.2.12. The use of עַבְדִּי as deference in prayer outside of Psalms by royal persons is: for David: 1 Sam 23:10-11; 25:39; 2 Sam 7:19-27 // 1 Chr 17-27; 2 Sam 24:10 // 1 Chr 21:8; for Solomon: 1 Kgs 3:7-8; and for Saul: 1 Sam 14:41.

<sup>136</sup> Chapter 9.2.2 also discusses the occasional designations of Zerubbabel and the future ideal Davidic ruler as עַבְדִּי of God.

<sup>137</sup> C.f. the suggested method for interpreting psalms provided by Bullock, *Encountering*, 50-56. Amongst the things Bullock suggest that need to be covered are what has been discussed: the difficult-to-determine items such as who is the speaker in the psalm, does the psalm reflect individual or corporate concerns, the purpose of the psalm, and the genre of the psalm.

### 8.2.5. Conclusions

עֶבֶד as used in the psalms is a term that the speaker uses to relate to YHWH. In most uses, the idea of dependency on and loyalty to YHWH is apparent. Yet, in similar fashion for prophets and significant people in texts outside of Psalms, the idea of status appears when עֶבֶד is used in connection with named individuals and Israel. When the term is used in connection with the voice of a psalm, 'we' or 'I', it is primarily used in the context of supplication and/or claims of loyalty to YHWH. This makes apparent the idea of dependency on and loyalty inherent in the term. That is, עֶבֶד calls up the derived association of slavery, 'loyalty', derived from the association, 'work'. There are differences in the use of the term in relation to the voice of the psalms. For the 'we' voice, עֲבָדֶיךָ is only used in the context of supplication for YHWH's favour, normally expressed as asking YHWH to forgive and restore the nation of Israel. For the 'I' voice, עֲבָדְךָ is used in the context of the personal situation of enemies, need for protection or deliverance, and need for help to be loyal to YHWH, as well as general requests for YHWH's favour, also expressed as a need for forgiveness by and restoration with YHWH. עֲבָדְךָ, when used in connection with the voice in a psalm, ultimately is used as one of a number of emotional arguments for YHWH to answer supplication, but it is not a term that automatically infers a reciprocal relationship with YHWH (as some scholarship implies; that is, God is obligated to care for the speaker), nor that the voice in a psalm is solely that of the Israelite king (also contrary to some scholarship).

The use of עֶבֶד in relation to the voice in a psalm also only occurs in psalms that are generally classified as 'lament' or 'prayer' psalms or the subcategory of 'thanksgiving' psalms, and the two 'torah' psalms, 19 and 119. That is, the use of עֶבֶד in connection with supplication correlates with genre: those psalms that are recognised to be prayers. This correlation of עֶבֶד with psalm genre shows how the term adds to the presentation of the voice in each of these psalms as a loyal worshipper of YHWH. When עֶבֶד is used as a title for individuals, it is normally found in psalms that focus on Israel's salvation-history. It is in this connection that עֶבֶד carries the idea of status, along with those uses of עֶבֶד in connection with David. In Pss 132 and 144, the use of עֶבֶד in connection with David is part of motivations for YHWH to favour the clearly royal voice. The study of עֶבֶד in relation to psalm genre also indicates, as hinted from the study of עֶבֶד within the text of the psalms, that as a noun it is an occasional

formulaic term to describe the voice in some psalms, Israel, famous past individuals. As a verb, it is a term that carries the meaning, ‘to worship’.

When clues are suggested to determine who is the voice in the ‘I’ psalms, עֲבַד should not be considered as a clue. For example, in contrast to those scholars who understand עֲבַד to be a term used only for the royal person (that is, it reflects the idea that the king is the servant of God), עֲבַד is not exclusively used in connection with the king. This is indicated by inconsistent discussion on עֲבַד by some scholars and the fact that עֲבַד appears in psalms that are not thought as being royal. The latter occurrences relate to the wide use in the ancient Near East of ‘servant’ as a term of deference to superiors, and as a term of deference to deity, by all classes of people, not just the king.

Consequently, עֲבַד in Psalms, when used as deference, carries associations of loyalty and dependence on YHWH, which build on the associations of slavery, ‘work’ and ‘possession.’ Occasionally it is used as a title for status. In contrast to the arguments of some scholarship, it is not a title that is exclusively used for the Israelite king.

### **8.3. עֲבַד IN OTHER PRAYERS**

Other prayers in the Hebrew Bible affirm aspects of what has been concluded for the use of עֲבַד in Psalms. The occurrences of עֲבַד in these prayers are listed in Chapter 4.2.12.1-3.

Jacob’s prayer in Gen 32:10-13 [9-12] and Abraham and Lot’s respective interactions with God and angels (Gen 18-19) have been discussed in Chapter 7.2.2.4 and 7.2.3.1. In these interactions, עֲבַד remains lexicalised, except when Abraham and Lot offer hospitality to God/angels (Gen 18:1-5; 19:2). In this context, the subsequent narrative plays on the ‘work’ association of slavery since both characters wait upon their guests. Abraham’s bargaining with YHWH over Sodom in Gen 18:23-33, without use of עֲבַד, also affirms what has been found for Psalms: עֲבַד is an occasional term used as a circumlocution for the first person. In Gen 18:23-33, it is replaced by a number of other forms of politeness to show that Abraham, despite his audacity, remains respectful to YHWH.

The prayers elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible show considerable variation in the use of עֶבֶד. Some use עֶבֶד frequently in deference, most notably Hannah's vow in 1 Sam 1:11 (אֲמַתְךָ); David's request in 1 Sam 23:10-11; David's prayer of thanks in 2 Sam 7:18-29; and Solomon's prayer for wisdom in 1 Kgs 3:6-9. However, the first-person is not entirely absent. In other prayers, עֶבֶד is used infrequently, and the first person frequently, as in Psalms: 1 Sam 14:21 [LXX]; 1 Kgs 8:23-53 (vv.28-30, 52) // 2 Chr 6:14-61 (vv.19-21, 59); Neh 1:5-11 (vv.6, 11); and Dan 9:4-19 (v.17). There are yet other prayers where עֶבֶד is not present: 1 Sam 30:7-8; Ezra 9:6-15; Neh 9:6-37. This variation in frequency of use of עֶבֶד, shows, as for Psalms, that עֶבֶד is a swap for 'I' (or 'we') as well as being a convention that is not obligatory in prayer. 1 Sam 30:7-8 in comparison with 23:10-11 brings this out clearly. The two prayers are similar: requests for God to answer through a priest using the Urim and Thummim oracle.<sup>138</sup> But עֶבֶד is absent in 1 Sam 30:7-8, whereas it is frequent in 23:10-11.

There are some patterns in the use of עֶבֶד (and אֲמָה) in these prayers. In 1 Sam 1:11, אֲמָה appears in the first half of Hannah's vow, which is her request for a son (*O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant [אֲמַתְךָ], and remember me, and not forget your servant [אֲמַתְךָ], but will give to your servant [אֲמַתְךָ] a male child*). In the second half of the prayer, the vow proper, אֲמַתְךָ is abandoned in favour of the first-person. Similar is the case in David's two-round request of God using the Urim and Thummim oracle in 1 Sam 23:10-12. As noted above, David uses עֶבֶד frequently in the first round (vv.10-11) but abandons it in favour of the first person entirely in the second round (v.12). Hannah's abandonment can be explained as reflecting the use of the politeness strategy, 'give reasons', which has been shown in Chapters 6 and 7 to be always associated with an absence or reduced use of master-slave deference. However, the second round in David's request is a second request. It matches the style of requests using the oracle narrated in 1 Samuel (see 14:41 and 30:7-8), which makes his use of עֶבֶד in vv.10-11 unusual. Even though this matches a reasonably typical biblical pattern of a speech by an inferior to a superior opening with master-slave deference, shown most consistently in Genesis (see Chapter 7.4), it is probably best explained as a

<sup>138</sup> 1 Sam 14:41 in the LXX has a similar style of prayer uttered by Saul: *Saul said, 'O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant today? If this guilt is in me or in my son Jonathan, O LORD God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim'* (NRSV). This is in contrast to the MT's *Saul said to the LORD, the God of Israel, 'give a perfect [thummim].'*

stylistic variation by the narrator, in keeping with the wider Samuel narratives, which show no set patterns in the use of master-slave deference.<sup>139</sup>

David's prayer of 2 Sam 7:18-29 has a near consistent use of עֲבֹדָה instead of the first-person. In contrast to respectful speech to people, עֲבֹדָה is coupled with direct address to God, though this is frequently coupled with vocatives ('O LORD, the God of Israel'; 'O Lord GOD'), instead of 'my lord-I' deference. This makes the prayer close to Psalms, where intimacy with God is assumed. Beyond this, David's prayer is exceptionally polite because his style of deference does not vary across the prayer, not even when he gives reasons for his single request in v.29a. The same is the case for Solomon's prayer for wisdom in 1 Kgs 3:6-9: he shows the same consistent style of address as David, though the first-person is used a little more than in David's prayer. As noted for Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 1:11) and for the prayers in Genesis, master-slave deference normally reduces when the supplicant gives reasons, found also in Abigail's speech in 1 Sam 25:23-31.

David and Solomon's politeness is also highlighted by leaving the request to last (2 Sam 7:18-29a; 1 Kgs 3:9). This also occurs in 1 Sam 23:10-11. In the Samuel narratives, leaving the request to last is not a pattern, found only in 1 Sam 28:21-22 and 2 Sam 19:34-37, though it is common in Genesis, and occurs in Neh 1:5-11 and Dan 9:4-19. The politeness of David and Solomon's prayers is also added to by their use of self-abasement (2 Sam 7:18; 1 Kgs 3:7). Self-abasement, as discussed in Chapters 5-7, is a form of deference, highlighting the hearer's magnanimity and superiority over the speaker. It also takes the role of giving thanks.<sup>140</sup> Given this, a reduction in master-slave deference can be expected, which occurs in the two prayers: both statements of self-abasement are in the first-person.

In prayers in which עֲבֹדָה appears only occasionally, there are also patterns. In the prayers of 1 Kgs 8:23-53 // 2 Chr 6:14-61 (Solomon) and Neh 1:5-11 (Nehemiah), עֲבֹדָה for deference appears as a frame for the prayer, similar to some requests in Genesis. The request proper in

<sup>139</sup> See Chapter 6.4 for 1 Sam 25 and 2 Sam 14. See also 2 Sam 19:18b-40, in which Ziba opens his speaking to David with עֲבֹדָה then changes to first-person solely (vv.18b-20), Mephibostheth uses עֲבֹדָה and the first-person equally (vv.26-28) in his speech, and Barzillai opens his speech with the first-person, then changes to an equal use of and עֲבֹדָה (vv.34-38).

<sup>140</sup> See Appendix 1.2 for a fuller discussion.

Nehemiah's prayer is also last, and so includes עֲבָדָךְ (Neh 5:11).<sup>141</sup> The same occurs in Daniel's prayer (Dan 9:17), except that עֲבָדָךְ does not frame the prayer. This matches the pattern of prayer and dialogue with the divine in Genesis. In Solomon's prayer, the primary request, *hear the plea of your servant*, frames the prayer (1 Kgs 8:28-30, 52) // 2 Chr 6:19-21, 59). The lengthy middle section is a series of prayers that flow out from that request. It is noteworthy that in Solomon's prayer, עֲבָדָךְ appears as a title for David and for the people, in keeping with both Psalms and prophetic literature. In Solomon's benediction (1 Kgs 8:56-61), there is no pattern of framing, but עֲבָדָךְ appears in the restated request from his prayer, that God hear his prayer (v.59).

The prayers of 2 Sam 7, 1 Kgs 3 and 1 Kgs 8, all tying together the themes of worship, dynasty, temple, and rule, no doubt indicate the close relationship between court and cult, as discussed above in connection with the voice in the 'I' psalms. The critical issue here, however, is deciding what was original to early monarchic times and what may have been added later. The high use of עֲבָדָךְ in these three prayers,<sup>142</sup> also adds to the perception of the king being the servant of YHWH, as discussed in Section 8.2.4. However, as noted there, its use by Jacob, Hannah (אֲמָתְךָ), Samson (Judg 15:18), Nehemiah (Neh 1:6, 11) and Daniel (Dan 9:17), shows that it is not a royal term.

To summarise, all supplicants in prayers outside of Psalms, whether royal, a leader, or ordinary person, when requesting or thanking God, use עֲבָדָךְ as deference to highlight both the relative power between them and God, and to express loyalty and dependency on God. This is the same as in Psalms. When עֲבָד is used as a title (for Moses and David), it is in line with both Psalms and prophetic literature: David and Moses' status as Israel's leaders and in close relationship with God is highlighted. That עֲבָד is only an optional term to replace the first-person, as in Psalms, is shown by its absence in 1 Sam 30:7-8; Ezra 9:6-15; Neh 9:6-37; and the prayers/laments of Jeremiah (Jer.11:18-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:1-18).<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Note, however, that Nehemiah's real request, that God enable him to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, is indirect, a form of politeness. Nehemiah asks only for 'success' in front of the Persian king.

<sup>142</sup> Noted in Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC 7; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996) 343. See references in fn.135 above.

<sup>143</sup> H. Lalleman - de Winkel, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (CBET 26; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 226.



#### 8.4. CONCLUSIONS

The use of slave terms as deference to God in Psalms and prayers outside of the Book of Psalms highlights the relative power between them and God, and expresses loyalty and dependency on God. The former is what deference deals with: making explicit the relationship between speaker and hearer (see Table 2, Chapter 2.3.1), and calls up the association of slavery, ‘inferior status.’ The latter, loyalty and dependency, is a derived association of slavery, building on the associations, ‘possession’ and ‘work’.

As with deference to people in the biblical narratives, the use of master-slave deference in prayer is not universal, and it forms part of the appeal for requests to be granted. However, there is a notable difference between its use to people and its use to God: when used to God, God is frequently put in the second person or the personal name YHWH used, and עבדך is usually far more infrequent in prayer than in speech to others. That is, prayer in the Hebrew Bible is characterised by direct language, with the deferential use of slave terms used only occasionally as rhetoric to assist the purpose of the prayer. The loyalty associated with this use of עבדך is generally absent in speech to other people in the narratives, though present in the Lachish letters. In speech to other people, master-slave deference is primarily used to keep the status differential between interactants intact, appealing to the power the hearer has to grant the request sought. However, this, like the ‘possession’ and ‘loyalty’ associations evoked in the deferential use of עבדך in Psalms and other prayer, is rhetoric designed to assist the hearer to favourably grant requests presented. Obviously, in prayer, God is recognised to be superior to the one who prays. But there is a sense of intimacy that is not found in biblical narrative or the Lachish letters: an intimacy that pushes the status difference between God and prayer/worshipper somewhat into the background. Any power difference between God and the one who prays is frequently expressed in the terms of other images, such as ‘king’, ‘rock’, ‘redeemer’, and so on. Does this make prayer a separate category from requests to people? I think not. The key difference between the two is the near consistent use of the name YHWH and the second person. When עבד is used by the supplicant, it remains in accord with how it is used in supplication to another person.

This sense of intimacy with God is reflected in the use of עבד in Psalms for individuals: as for its use to designate prophets and other significant people in the prophetic books, such

people's closeness to God is what gives them status. Thus Psalms and other prayers combine the two main uses of עֶבֶד in the Hebrew Bible, deference and designation of people in relation to God, to show worshippers as intimate with God and loyal to God, and thus worthy of God's favour.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE USE OF עַבַּד IN PROPHETIC LITERATURE

#### 9.1. INTRODUCTION

One genre of biblical literature remains to be discussed: the prophetic books. In these books, the majority of uses of עַבַּד are for people, and sometimes Israel, in relation to God. The use of master-slave deference in narrative sections is rare, as is master-slave deference in prayer. A rare exception is the prayer in Dan 9:4-19. Thus, this chapter in effect extends the analysis presented in Chapter 8.2.1 for Psalms for the use of עַבַּד for Israel and people in relation to God.

My aim in this chapter is to discuss specifically the use of עַבַּד to denote people as ‘the servant/s of YHWH’, to draw out what associations of slavery are being evoked by this use, and for what purpose the associations are being used. This in effect builds upon what has been discussed in Chapter 8.

As was done for the voice of individual prayer/lament psalms, I will also discuss the matter of whether the royal court is the first association evoked with the use of slave terms for people in relation to God, especially for the prophets themselves. This use of עַבַּד is generally lexicalised, helped not just by a long history of use of slave terms in relation to temple staff and worshippers of deities in the ancient Near East, covered in Chapter 8.2.1, but also for the long history of use of slave terms for courtiers and officials.<sup>1</sup> The frequent use of עַבַּד in relation to the king allows for the possibility that service to the king, itself a metaphor use of עַבַּד, is the vehicle for the deferential use of master-slave language. However, in similar

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<sup>1</sup> C.f. Masamichi Yamada, ‘The Hittite Social Concept of ‘Free’ in the Light of the Emar Texts’, *AoF* 22 (1995) 304, 314. For texts, see Edward J. Bridge, ‘Enslaved to an Artifice: a Study into the Truth behind the Title of Deference, “Slave/Servant”, as used in the Ancient Near East before the Time of Alexander The Great’, *Humanity* 2 (2008) 2-3, <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/Resources/Schools/Humanities%20and%20Social%20Science/Humanity/Bridge.pdf> (overview of text types and periods); William J. Murnane, *Texts from the Amarna Period in Egypt* (SBL Writings from the Ancient World 5; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995) 36, 45-46, 53, 62-63, 142, 144, 151, 153, 171-177, 180-182, 186, 193-196, 236-237, 240 (Amarna period inscriptions; the use of ‘lord’ for Pharaoh is extensive); William W. Hallo, ‘Seal Inscriptions’, in *Early Near Eastern Seals in the Yale Babylonian Collection* (ed., B. Buchanan, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 444-445, 447, 449-462 (early Babylon period seal inscriptions); Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia* (SBLWAW 3; Atlanta, 1993) 59, 66-68, 72-73, 84, 95-96, 99, 108, 112, 114, 121 (early Babylon period seal inscriptions); EA 8, 29, 40, 55, 96, 101, 164, 239, 271 (Amarna period letters; William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* [Baltimore, London: John Hopkins University Press, 1992]). Generally, Egyptian kings did not designate their people as ‘servants’, as evidenced in the Amarna period inscriptions and in the letters collated in Edward Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* (SBLWAW1; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990).

fashion to what has been argued for master-slave deference in Chapters 6 and 7 and 8.2.1, I will argue that when slave terms for titles move beyond a lexicalised use, associations of slavery are evoked, not service to the monarch. This matter is also revisited in Chapter 10 when I draw my threads together to summarise the biblical use of slave terms outside of the setting of slavery.

The use of עֶבֶד to denote people as ‘the servant/s of YHWH’, in prophetic texts are (see also Chapter 4.2.11):

For Isaiah: Isa 20:3

For prophets in general: Amos 3:7; Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezek 38:17; Isa 44:26 (implied); Zech 1:6; Dan 9:6

For David: Jer 33:21-26

For an ideal future king of the Davidic line: Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25

For the people of Israel:

עֶבֶד (‘servant’; usually ‘my servant Jacob’): Isa 41:8-9; 42:19 (implied); 43:10; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27-28

עָבַד (‘serve’): Jer 30:9; Ezek 20:40<sup>2</sup>

For Jacob as the ancestor of the people: Ezek 28:25; 37:25

For the ‘suffering servant’: Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12

For Zerubbabel: Hag 2:23

For Moses: Mal 3:22 [4:4]; Dan 9:11

For a foreign king, Nebuchadnezzar: Jer 25:9; 43:10

The list shows three main contexts for this use of עֶבֶד: for Israel, Israel’s leaders, and prophets. Nebuchadnezzar as designated as YHWH’s עֶבֶד has him in the role of God’s agent; that is, he ‘works’ for YHWH, or can be considered to be a vassal of YHWH.<sup>3</sup> The ‘suffering servant’ in Isa 40-55 is a special case and will be treated separately.

<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the prophetic texts, עֶבֶד for denoting Israel as God’s servant is rare in the legal and narrative texts, appearing only in 1 Kgs 8:32, 36 // 2 Chr 6:23, 27; Neh 1:6, 10. Instead, עָבַד is used more frequently: Ex 3:12; 7:16; 10:26; 23:25; Deut 10:12; Josh 24:15; 1 Sam 12:24; 2 Chr 12:8.

<sup>3</sup> Ziony Zevit, ‘The Use of עֶבֶד as a Diplomatic Term in Jeremiah’, *JBL* 88 (1969) 74-77.

Other patterns are also visible. All occurrences of עֶבֶד, except for Amos 3:7, occur in exilic and post-exilic prophetic texts.<sup>4</sup> Israel as YHWH's עֶבֶד is only found in Isa 40-55 and in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>5</sup> The title always occurs in the context of Israel in exile. The few references to Israel's leaders, with their focus on David and Moses as ideal leaders, is in line with the narrative texts, in which both Moses and David are portrayed as paradigms for leadership.<sup>6</sup> The phrase עֲבָדֵי/וֹן הַנְּבִיאִים ('my/his/your servants the prophets') always refers to earlier prophets, except for Amos 3:7.

## 9.2. THE USE OF עֶבֶד AS A DESIGNATION

### 9.2.1. עֶבֶד used to designate Israel

As just noted, the use of עֶבֶד for Israel in prophetic texts is confined to Isa 40-55, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It is used in the context of exile, and mostly when a restored relationship with God, along with the ending of the exile, is promised (Isa 41:8-9; 44:1-2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27-28; 30:9; Ezek 20:40).

*Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea,  
Declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it,  
Send it forth to the end of the earth;  
Say, "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!"* (Isa 48:20, NRSV)

*For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of Israel, says the Lord GOD, there  
all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me (יַעֲבֹדֵנִי) in the land; there I will  
accept them, ...'* (Ezek 20:40, NRSV)

Twice the phrase is used for Israel in the context of criticism of the nation. In Isa 42:19, Israel (implied) is criticised for being blind and deaf; and in 43:10, Israel is a witness of God's former actions toward them. This is in keeping with a motif in Isa 40-55 that the nation needs to believe God that the exile will end (e.g. 45:9-14; 46:8-13).

<sup>4</sup> A number of scholars argue Amos 3:7 is a later insertion. See Section 9.2.3 below for discussion.

<sup>5</sup> The consensus of scholarship is that Isa 40-55 was composed in the late exile. Even those who defend the book of Isaiah as a unified composition dating back to the eighth century (e.g. J.A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* [Leicester: IVP, 1993] 25-30; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 23-28), recognise that chs 40-55 focus on Israel in exile and give the promise the exile will end.

<sup>6</sup> References from the historical books are listed in Section 9.2.2 below. Some of these texts (Num 12:7; 2 Sam 3:18) cannot be automatically dated to the post exilic period, unless it is argued that the wider narrative in which they are embedded date to either period. See Section 9.2.3.

Generally, עֶבֶד is a term connected with hope. The demoralised nation in exile is contrasted with God's intense concern for them (e.g. Isa 42:18-43:7; 45:9-14; 46:8-13; Jer 30:10). This is also assisted by parallel imagery in Isa 40-55 that accompanies the 'servant' language, such as 'chosen' (בָּחַר; Isa 41:8; 43:10; 44:1-2; 45:4), 'called' (קָרָא; Isa 41:9) and 'made/formed' (יָצַר; Isa 44:2, 21).<sup>7</sup> The parallel terms create difficulty for ascertaining the metaphorical import behind the use of עֶבֶד because it is possible to understand it at a number of levels. But all express 'hope' for the future of God's people.

First is the use of constant designation of the nation in Isa 40-55 as 'Jacob' and 'Israel'. The name Jacob in particular draws attention to that patriarch who fathered the twelve tribes. This is particularly so in Ezekiel 28:25 and 37:25 in which 'Jacob' remains as a figure in the past and 'Israel' is used for the present nation. This allows for the metaphorical import of עֶבֶד to be seen. Despite the importance of the patriarchs in Israelite thinking and history, there are only three other references to them as עֲבָדִים of God: Deut 9:27; Ps 105:6 and 42. Deut 9:27, in similar fashion to Isa 40-55 and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, contrasts the patriarchs as 'servants' in contrast to a rebellious nation. As noted in Chapters 3.2 and 4.2.11.3.1, the patriarchs are viewed as faithful worshippers of and obedient to God, despite their faults. It is their loyalty to God that is in focus.

Second, the term 'called' suggests a special role for the nation as YHWH's עֶבֶד. This is specified to be a messenger (מַלְאָךְ; 42:19) and a witness (עֵד; 43:10). Again, the idea of 'messenger' can be related to envoys of a king, helped by 'king' being the most frequent image of God in the Hebrew Bible, and human kings being the main characters in biblical narrative from 1 Samuel onwards.<sup>8</sup> But other people also send messengers in the Bible (e.g. Gen 24; 32:4[3], 7[6]; 1 Sam 25:5-14, 40-42 [נֵעָר, מַלְאָךְ, and עֶבֶד used]; 2 Sam 17:17 [שַׁפְּחָה]; 2 Kgs 9:4 [נֵעָר]).

Third, 'made/ formed' calls up the idea that whoever makes something owns or controls it. That is, it connotes possession, which, as discussed in Chapter 3.2.2, is an association of slavery. In Isa 40-55, however, 'possession' of Israel by YHWH is for a positive purpose:

<sup>7</sup> These other designations for Israel are also found by themselves in Isa 40-55. See, e.g. for 'made/formed', 43:1; 44:24; and for 'called', 43:1; 48:12.

<sup>8</sup> Marc Z. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSS 76; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989)

Israel is precious to and honoured by YHWH (e.g. 43:4). It is the clearest allusion to metaphoricity in ‘servant’: YHWH will protect Israel (that is, restore the nation) on analogy with normal human behaviour with what is owned: protect it and seek recompense if it is damaged or stolen (c.f. Ex 21:26-15).

The use of עֶבֶד for Israel as a nation in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isa 40-55 thus draws on the associations of slavery, ‘work’ and ‘possession’, along with ‘loyalty’. The three associations, in the context of hope for the exiled nation, show that it is a term of status. Israel, as YHWH’s עֶבֶד, is God’s ‘possession’, restored to their land and relationship with their Maker. But, like a slave, Israel also has to ‘work’ for YHWH: as YHWH’s witness and messenger to the nations and be loyal to YHWH, clearly expressed in Jer 30:9 and Ezek 20:40. A similar idea is found in Ps 89:20-21[19-20]; 105:26. As discussed in Chapter 8.2.1, the idea of a nation being the servant of a deity is a common ancient Near Eastern idea, reflected in much literature. And if the deity is presented as glorious (here YHWH is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and more powerful than any other deity), then the nation has status in a derived fashion by its association with that deity. Thus Israel as YHWH’s עֶבֶד will be the most honourable nation of the earth because of their association with YHWH.

### 9.2.2. עֶבֶד used to designate Israel’s leaders

The second context of the use of עֶבֶד in prophetic literature is for Israel’s leadership. As noted above, there are only a few references. But Moses and David are prominent.

For David: Jer 33:21-26

For an ideal future king of the Davidic line: Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25

For Moses: Dan 9:11; Mal 3:22 [4:4]

For Zerubbabel: Hag 2:23

For Eliakim, a high official: Isa 22:20

These references are in line with those for David and Moses in narrative texts:

For Moses: Num 12:7; Deut 34:5; Josh 1; 1 Kgs 8:53, 56; 2 Kgs 18:12; 21:8; Neh 1:7-8; 9:14; 10:30[29].

For David: 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5 // 1 Chr 17:4; 1 Kgs 3:6; 8:24, 66; 11:13, 32-34; 14:8; 2 Kgs 8:19; 19:34 // Isa 37:35; 2 Kgs 20:6.

There is an exception: Hezekiah is designated as God's עֶבֶד in 2 Chr 31:20-21.

It is also the same when עֶבֶד is used for individuals in Psalms:

Pss 18:1 [title]; 36:1 [title]; 78:70; 89:4[3], 21[20], 40[39]; 105:26; 132:10 (see Chapter 8.2.1).

As noted already, the references to David and Moses in prophetic texts occur only in exilic and post-exilic texts. This can be explained by the exile with the resulting loss of the monarchy, which in turn resulted in the Israelites looking to heroic leaders of the past for inspiration. Such leaders became idealised and became models for a future leadership free of foreign submission.<sup>9</sup> Zerubbabel in Hag 2:23 is not explicitly connected with the ideal Davidic ruler, but being called עֶבֶד ('my servant') in God's words as well as 'chosen' (בָּחַר) may suggest Haggai understands him as an independent ruler of the returned exiles, helped by his being a descendant of David (compare 1 Chr 3:17 with Ezra 3:2 and Hag 2:23).<sup>10</sup> Isa 22:15-25 does not give any reason why Eliakim is chosen over Shebna, except that Shebna is denounced for having built an ostentatious tomb. Here, Eliakim as God's עֶבֶד is to fulfil the role of a high official: a form of service for God.

Why designate David and Moses, and future ideal rulers as God's 'servants'? As for the patriarchs, the Hebrew Bible portrays David and Moses as faithful worshippers of and obedient to God, despite their faults. That is, they are loyal to God. However, unlike the patriarchs, they are in leadership of a clearly defined people or nation (David). This leadership can be viewed as a form of 'work' for God, an association of slavery.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g. H. Ringgren, H. Simian-Yofre, U. Rüterwörden, 'עֶבֶד *'ābad*; עֶבְדָּה *'ebed*; עֶבְדָּה *'bōdā*', in *TDOT* (eds, G.J. Botterwick, H. Ringgren, H.-J. Fabry; trans. D.W. Stott; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: 1992 [1986], Vol. 10) 394-395.

<sup>10</sup> So J. Maxwell Miller, John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 520 (but arguing that Zerubbabel's Davidic descent was a fiction by the compilers of 1 Chr); Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 31, 146. John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 372 canvasses this view but remains unsure if was the case. Others see the prophecy as relating only to the moment (rebuilding the temple, organising the newly-established exilic community): e.g. William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, Frederic W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 396; or as inspiring hope in the restored kingship, not it happening at the time of Haggai: e.g. Andrew E. Hill, John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 529-530; J. Alec Motyer, 'Haggai', in *The Minor Prophets Vol 3: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed., T.E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids Baker, 1998) 1002; Iain Provan, V. Phillips Long, Tremper Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) 289-290.



One aspect of David's 'work' for God is his defeating of Israel's enemies. Zimmerli argues that this was the 'special duty' of the king: 'saving the people of God out of the hand of their enemies', citing 2 Sam 3:18.<sup>11</sup> Thus an association of slavery called up by David, Hezekiah and Zerubbabel as 'servants' of God is 'work'. The Hebrew Bible's portrayal of David suits this (2 Sam 8-10 // 1 Chr 18-20), as does its portrayal of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 19), but defeating enemies is not the 'work' for which other 'good' kings are noted. Rather, it is the 'work' of piety to God. This is the key 'work' David performed, shown by establishing the worship of YHWH in Jerusalem. David's piety is also emphasised in 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles when all later kings of Judah are compared with him on the matter of their adherence and promotion of YHWH worship.<sup>12</sup> Yet, of these kings, only Hezekiah has עֶבֶד applied to him in relation to God (2 Chr 31:20-21). Why this occurs is difficult to know.<sup>13</sup> Other kings are also portrayed very positively in both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles in regard to their piety toward YHWH, especially Josiah, yet עֶבֶד is not used of them. 2 Kgs 20:12-19, 2 Chr 32:31 and Isa 28-35 (usually accepted as having been spoken during Hezekiah's reign) show criticism of Hezekiah's policies, and the devastation as a result of Assyria's invasion of Judah and near capture of Jerusalem is glossed over in 2 Kings and even more so in 2 Chronicles.<sup>14</sup> For some reason, both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles portray Hezekiah more positively than what appears to be warranted. But, like Israel as a nation, there is status derived from being a 'servant' of God. That David is used as the standard for later kings' piety presupposes this. As is well known and discussed in Chapter 8.2.4.2, this matches the common ancient Near Eastern ideology of the king being installed by deity and a 'servant' of deity. But as a servant of deity, the ancient Near Eastern kings also had to be fair to their people.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> W. Zimmerli, J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (SBT; transs. H. Knight, J. Jeremias and others; SCM, 1965) 22.

<sup>12</sup> As indicated in Chapter 6.2, fns 7 and 8, the portrayal of David in 1-2 Samuel is mixed. This has implications for the composition of the Deuteronomistic History: why present David in an ambivalent light in 1-2 Samuel, yet focus on his piety in 1-2 Kgs? The works referred to in fns 1-8 in Chapter 6.2 present various views that assist to answer this question.

<sup>13</sup> At the least, as Ringgren et al, 'עֶבֶד,' 395, notes, עֶבֶד יְהוָה 'does not represent a characteristic royal epithet'.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g. Nadav Na'aman, 'The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers', *JSOT* 65 (1995) 51-52, who focuses on 2 Kgs. 2 Chr 32:27-29 portrays Hezekiah as very wealthy – something that would be difficult maintain after Sennacherib's invasion.

<sup>15</sup> W.G. Lambert, 'Kingship in Ancient Mesopotamia', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSS 270; ed. J. Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 57 (Sumer), 60 (Ur III), 65 (neo-Babylonia), 69-70 (Assyria); J. Day, 'The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy', in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSS 270; ed. J. Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 86-87 (Canaanite); and Moshe Weinfeld, 'The King as Servant', *JJS* 33 (1982) 193 (Assyria). See also Kieth W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSS 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979); and Job Y. Jindo, 'Toward a Poetics of the Biblical Mind: Language, Culture, and Cognition', *VT* 59 (2009) 238.

Moses' 'servant' status with God is similar to that of David: his leadership is 'work' on behalf of God, and his piety represents 'loyalty' to God (noted in Chapter 4.2.11.3.3). However, unlike David, the associations of slavery in the use of עֶבֶד are only played upon in one text: Num 12:7. Here, Moses is described by God as a household manager, or a head servant/slave. Despite 'king' being the favourite image for God in the Hebrew Bible, Num 12:7 is one of a few times when God is portrayed as the head, or owner, of a household. עֶבֶד maps directly to this, since, as discussed in Chapter 3.2.2, domestic slavery is the most prevalent form of slavery in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East. However, like for the use of עֶבֶד for Israel and David, it is a term of status, deriving from Moses' very close relationship with God, which in Num 12:6-8 is said to be unique. That is, Moses' servant status derives from both his role as God's head servant/slave and his close relationship with God.

That David and Moses as 'servants' of God only appear in exilic and post-exilic prophetic texts raises an historical-critical matter. Since the final compilation of Josh-2 Kgs occurred at the earliest in the exile (see 2 Kgs 25:27-30), it is possible that David and Moses' designation as עֶבֶד יְהוָה is an editor/compiler's term rather than a designation of them from earlier times. That is, there may be theological or ideological views being expressed by such a designation. Discussions of this matter generally relates to the use of עֶבֶד for prophets, as this use of עֶבֶד also is only found in exilic and post-exilic prophetic texts with the exception of Amos 3:7; and Moses is also designated as a prophet in Dt 18:18 and 34:10. I will discuss this matter below.

### 9.2.3. עֶבֶד used to designate prophets

The third major use of עֶבֶד in prophetic literature is for prophets. With the exception of Isa 20:3, prophets only as a group are designated by עֶבֶד, in the form, עֲבָדַי הַנְּבִיאִים ('my/his servants the prophets': Isa 44:26 [implied];<sup>16</sup> Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4; Ezek 38:17; Dan 9:6; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6). Individual prophets are referred to as 'my/your/his servant' in 1-2 Kgs:

<sup>16</sup> 'Servant' in the first cola of 44:26a is עֲבָדוֹ, the singular 'his servant', whereas the parallel in the second cola is מְלָאכָיו, the plural 'his messengers'. מְלָאכָיו clearly refers to prophets as a group, but is a singular prophet singled out with עֲבָדוֹ? And if so, who?

Ahijah: 1 Kgs 14:18; 15:29.

Elijah: 1 Kgs 18:36; 2 Kgs 9:36; 10:10.

Jonah: 2 Kgs 14:25.

The plural, עבדי־הנביאים ('my/his servants the prophets'), appears in 2 Kgs 9:7; 17:13, 23; 21:10 and 24:2.

Some patterns of use are immediately visible. As already noted, the use of עבדי־הנביאים for prophets as a group is found in exilic or post-exilic prophetic texts.<sup>17</sup> The references to prophets as a group in 1-2 Kings are confined to 2 Kings and cover prophets from the ninth to early sixth centuries BCE. In contrast, the singular עבדי־עבדו is applied to named prophets of the tenth to eighth centuries BCE.<sup>18</sup> This patterning of references will be discussed later. The main question is, however, what does the use of עבדי־הנביאים and עבדי־עבדו for prophets convey?

The question is tied up with the wider issue of the role of the prophets. It is clear that prophets spoke on behalf of God, and so can be described as 'spokespersons' for God. But scholarship has always debated how this occurs; how this is differentiated from other religious mediatorial roles such as priests, seers, diviners and so on; how 'good' prophets in the Bible are differentiated from 'bad' prophets; and what exactly the term נביא exactly means. As Carroll points out, priests in the Hebrew Bible are also intermediaries (carriers of communication between the divine and the human), some people have the roles of both priest and prophet (especially Moses and Samuel), some people are narrated as receiving revelation from God and communicate it to others, yet others communicate 'revelation' without having been narrated to have been given it by God.<sup>19</sup> This last matter was a live issue in the late monarchic period. Jeremiah in Jer 23:16-32 claims the 'bad' prophets of his time were people to whom God had not given revelation, yet, in this passage, Jeremiah himself does not indicate that what he said was given to him by God!<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See fn.5 above. As noted in fn.16 above, who עבדו refers to in Isa 44:26a is not clear. Amos 3:7 is an exception, but as noted in fn.4, some scholarship argues Amos 3:7 is a late insertion.

<sup>18</sup> Isa 20:3 is also the same.

<sup>19</sup> Robert P. Carroll, 'Whose Prophet? Whose History? Whose Social Reality? Troubling the Interpretative Community Again: Notes Towards a Response To T.W. Overholt's Critique', *JSOT* 48 (1990) 38.

<sup>20</sup> The relationship between oracle and narrative, an important issue for Carroll, is discussed briefly in fn.53.

As to the role of prophets, scholarship up to the 1960s generally accepted Wellhausen and Duhm's view that prophets were theologians.<sup>21</sup> This acceptance began to be overturned in the 1960s, spearheaded by Ross and Lindblom, who argued that the prophets were messengers from God. Ross paralleled oracles headed with *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* ('Thus says YHWH') with ancient Near Eastern letters that used formulae such as '[the sender] says', 'say to'. Ross also paralleled oracles in which the prophet was told to 'go' and speak (e.g. Isa 6:9, *לֵךְ וְאָמַרְתָּ*; Jer 3:12, *וְלֵךְ וְקִרְאָתָּ*) with commands to messengers to travel and deliver a message. As part of his argument he also included reports of prophets being part of God's council (e.g. Isa 6:3; ch 40; Jer 23:18, 22).<sup>22</sup> The model of messengers and messages Ross and Lindblom used was that of royal messengers/envoys, on the assumption that God is portrayed as a king.<sup>23</sup> This understanding, that prophets were messengers, has been accepted by many.<sup>24</sup>

The weakness in Ross' theory is that *מֵלָאךְ* is rarely used for prophets, recognised by Ross himself. He explained this by saying that *מֵלָאךְ* was used in connection with messages of peace, which became the typical message for post-exilic prophets.<sup>25</sup> However, messages can contain more than peace! Other criticism is levelled at his understanding of the *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* formula: it occurs with all kinds of materials, not just 'messages', and messages do not always begin or end with the formula. The formula is absent in Hosea, Joel, and Habakkuk, but frequent in Amos, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.<sup>26</sup> It is also common in Zechariah and Malachi.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Noted in R.E. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant* (SIBT 43; London: SCM, 1965) 15. 'Theologian' is Clement's language.

<sup>22</sup> J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962); James F. Ross, 'The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger', in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (The Preacher's Library; eds, B.W. Anderson, W. Harrelson; London: SCM Press, 1962) 98-107.

<sup>23</sup> C.f. Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 24; Jindo, 'Toward,' 234-235.

<sup>24</sup> Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, 24-25; T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (The Biblical Seminar; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 156-164; Michael Avioz, 'The Call for Revenge in Jeremiah's Complaints (Jer XI-XX)', *VT* 55 (2005) 434, 438; A. Graeme Auld, 'Prophets through the Looking Glass: Between Writings and Moses', *JSOT* 27 (1983) 18 (implied). A number of scholars, in similar fashion to Ross, also present biblical references to messengers to support their acceptance that prophets were also messengers. See, e.g. Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 23; V.H. Matthews, D.C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel 1250-587 BC* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993) 218; and David Arthur, *A Smooth Stone: Biblical Prophecy in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001) 100-103. 'Umar S. Ashqar, (*The Messenger and the Message: In the Light of the Quran and Sunnah* [trans., N. al-Khattab; Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2003] 29-34) similarly argues that 'messenger' and 'prophet' in the Quran are synonymous in meaning.

<sup>25</sup> Ross, 'The Prophet,' 105-107.

<sup>26</sup> Gene M. Tucker, 'Prophetic Speech', in *Interpreting the Prophets* (eds, J.L. Mays, P.J. Achtemeier; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 27-40, citing Rolf Rendtorff, 'Botenformel and Botenspruch', *ZAW* 74 (1962) 165-177; and Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method* (trans., S.M. Cupitt; New York: Scribner's, 1969) 216ff, who were both critiquing the 'messenger' view of prophets as it was being developed.

Matthews and Benjamin, although accepting prophets as ‘messengers’ also note differences, such as ‘messengers carried information, whereas prophets delivered a legal verdict’ and ‘prophets were also involved in the response to their messages, unlike messengers.’<sup>28</sup> This also overstates the case: there are instances in the ancient Near East where messengers would have been called upon to explain messages and/or give response on the basis of how the recipient reacts to the message (esp. in diplomatic situations),<sup>29</sup> and legal verdicts occasionally appear in letters.<sup>30</sup> However, their point is valid: there are not always exact matches between the biblical portrayal of prophets and their messages and what is known about how messages were communicated in ancient Israel and in the wider ancient Near East.

What Matthews and Benjamin raise is taken further by Greene, who subjects the paralleling of biblical prophets with ancient Near Eastern and biblical messages and messengers to a exhaustive analysis to conclude that biblical prophets are not ‘messengers’.<sup>31</sup> Greene’s argument centres on the following:

- The general absence of a messenger formula in prophetic oracles
- The long messages of prophets in comparison with the majority of ANE messages
- The lack of מַלְאֲכַי (‘messenger’) applied to prophets (Isa 44:26; Hag 1:13 and Mal 3:1 are some of the few examples)
- The lack of epistolary prescripts (from X to Y; greetings; wishes; and the like)
- General bad reception given to the prophets

Like Matthews and Benjamin, much of this is overstated. Many ancient Near Eastern letters are long.<sup>32</sup> The lack of epistolary-like prescripts given in oracles can be explained as being

<sup>27</sup> Tucker considers the formula to be absent in Zechariah, but it occurs, especially in chapters 1 and 8.

<sup>28</sup> Matthews and Benjamin, *Social world*, 218.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g. Harry A. Hoffner, *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (SBLWAW 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) 13-15; Wentz, *Letters*, 10; Jack M. Sasson (ed.) *Civilisations of the Ancient Near East* (4 vols; New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1995, Vol. 3) 1465-1469 (extensively cited by Hoffner).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., John Huehnergard, ‘The Akkadian Letters’, in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies* (Handbook of Oriental Studies; eds, W.G.E. Watson, N. Wyatt; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 378; F. Brent Knutson, ‘Political and Foreign Affairs’, in *Ras Shamra Parallels* (AnOr 50; 2 vols; ed., L.R. Fisher; Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975, Vol. 2) 114-116 (citing RS 77.730 [PRU IV, p. 103]); Wentz, *Letters*, §§ 302-303 (Egyptian letters); Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (SBLWAW 7; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999) §§ 27, 27A; James M. Lindenberger, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965] § 8).

<sup>31</sup> John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East* (Brown Judaic Studies 169; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> See e.g., Hoffner, *Letters*, §§29b, 92, 98, 100-102, 114, 119; Beckman, *Hittite*, §§ 22F, 23 (Hittite); Wentz, *Letters*, §§68, 69, 129 [P.Anastasi I], 143, 290, 297, 310-315, 352-353 (Egyptian; various periods and includes ‘letters to the dead’). For lengthy Amarna letters, see, e.g. EA 1-44 (letters from the ‘great kings’); 74, 85, 94, 114-119, 138 (Rib-hadda); 149, 150, 155 (Abu-Milku of Tyre); 186; 250; 286-288 (‘Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem)

due to them being included in narrative and anthologies: such things can be dispensed with because narrative and the introduction to the collection of oracles in a prophetic book take care of them.<sup>33</sup> Greene also seems to forget that the prophets assume that God is superior to their audiences, whether the people worshipped God or not. Therefore, since prophets speak on behalf of God, common polite conventions can be dispensed with (as politeness theory predicts) in similar fashion as in letters from superiors (e.g. a king, an overlord) to inferiors in the ancient Near East.<sup>34</sup>

There is one issue that the debate seems to forget: the metaphoricity of using מַלְאֲךְ ('messenger') to describe the role of the prophets. As discussed briefly in Chapter 4.1, any term or description used for people in relation to God is, by default, metaphorical. A second issue is that messengers usually delivered written letters which they proclaimed, whereas, as far as can be ascertained, the biblical prophets did not use written texts. The exception is Jeremiah, who committed his oracles at least once to writing (Jer 36). This was due, however, to him being prevented from delivering them in person (Jer 36:5). However, in Judges – 2 Kings, many messages are not narrated as being written. If it can be argued that shorter messages such as 1 Sam 25:6-8 and 2 Sam 11:18-25 were fully oral, then the case for prophets as 'messengers' is strengthened, since message sending, being oral, becomes a closer parallel to the prophets' activity. Ultimately, to insist that prophets are to be understood solely as messengers of God, or to dismiss totally this understanding, is to over interpret what is presented in the Hebrew Bible.

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(Moran, *Amarna Letters*). The plea for rebuilding the Jewish temple at Elephantine (407 BCE) is an example of a lengthy Aramaic letter (Cowley 30) (B. Porten [ed. and trans.], *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans on Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translations* [Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1976] 90-93).

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g. F. Brent Knutson, 'Literary genres in PRU IV', in *Ras Shamra Parallels* (AnOr 50; 2 vols; ed., L.R. Fisher; Roma: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1975, vol. 2) 201, 210. See also Chapter 6.2.2.1, in which David's request to Nabal in 1 Sam 25:6-8 is paralleled with linguistic structures in the Lachish letters. Greene himself (pp. 45-76) also parallels messages in biblical narrative with ancient Near Eastern examples and notes this feature.

<sup>34</sup> Letters from Hittite overlords to the Ugaritic kings do not give greetings or prayer wishes (Knutson, 'Literary,' 200). The same is the case with Hittite letters from the king and other superiors to inferiors (see e.g. Hoffner, *Letters*, §§7-43, 71-76, 86-88, 123-124, 126). Egyptians did the same: including the king, the vizier, high officials, senior officials to juniors, and many others of unknown status including people to apparently their parents. Examples are too numerous to list, but the following brackets of texts in Wentz, *Letters*, provide many examples: §§ 2-15 [letters from the king]; §§ 36, 41-61 [letters from the vizier]; §§ 157-287 [Deir El-Medina letters]; §§ 300-333 [Late Ramesside period letters]). The same practice occurred with the Egyptian king to vassals in the Amarna period (EA 367, 379, 370).

Partly as a result of criticism of the ‘messenger’ view and partly as a result of a desire to integrate biblical prophets into the spectrum of people in both the Bible and the ancient Near East who communicate with the divine (e.g. seers, soothsayer priests, diviners, people who spoke while in trances or other forms of ‘ecstatic’ behaviour), ‘intermediary’ is now the preferred descriptor for the role of prophets.<sup>35</sup> This descriptor not only brings biblical prophets closer to other intermediary figures, but also brings priest and prophet conceptually closer, since biblical priests consulted God with the Urim and Thummim, and priests elsewhere in the ancient Near East also engaged in interpreting omens and divination.<sup>36</sup> Biblical prophets display some variety in practice, which suits the broad nature of ‘intermediary’ as a designation. As already noted, Moses and Samuel are prophet-priests. Samuel 1 Sam 9:5-10 is also described as a רֹאֵה (‘seer’), which in turn is also described as an early word for נְבִיא, and paralleled with אִישׁ-אֱלֹהִים (‘man of God’). חֹזֶה, which appears to be the more usual word for ‘seer’, is juxtaposed with נְבִיא in 2 Kgs 17:13 and Isa 30:10, and in 2 Chr 33:18 with 36:15-16.<sup>37</sup> Jeremiah and Ezekiel belonged to priestly families (Jer 1:1; Ezek 1:3). Isaiah is said to have received his call while at the temple (Isa 6). Elisha is once portrayed as requiring music before he receives an oracle (2 Kgs 3:15); that is, he receives the oracle when in a ‘trance’ or ‘ecstatic’ state.

‘Intermediary’, however is too broad to be useful.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately all prophets, no matter how they obtained their oracles, claim to speak words from deity. This is different from priests: prophets act as the deity’s direct spokespeople rather than view themselves as

<sup>35</sup> Tucker, ‘Prophetic Speech,’ 39; Thomas W. Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 17; restated in idem, ‘Prophecy in History: the Social Reality of Intermediation’, *JSOT* 48 (1990) 3-29; J.R. Porter, ‘The Origins of Prophecy in Israel’, in *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (eds, R. Coggins, A. Phillips, M. Knibb; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 22, 24; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 189; David L. Petersen, ‘Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature’, in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives* (SBLSS 13; ed., M. Nissinen; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 33-41.

<sup>36</sup> C.f. Porter, ‘Origins,’ 12-31; Petersen, ‘Defining,’ 37, 41-42. C.f. Mal 2:7 in which the priest is also called a מְלֹאךְ of God.

<sup>37</sup> See Blenkinsopp, *Sage*, 124-126, cf. Carroll, ‘Whose Prophet?’ 37, for discussion. It is such juxtapositions of the terms that raises the matter of ‘what is a prophet?’ With regard to רֹאֵה versus חֹזֶה, both are used across a broad range of texts. For רֹאֵה, see e.g. 1 Sam 9:9-19; 2 Sam 15:27; 1 Chr 9:22; 2 Chr 16:7-10; Isa 30:10. For חֹזֶה, see e.g. 2 Sam 24:11; 1 Chr 21:9; 25:5; 2 Chr 9:29; 19:2; 33:18; Isa 29:10; Amos 7:12; Mic 3:7. That is, neither term is an early or late period term, unless they can be argued to be editorial preferences, such as is commonly argued for עֶבֶר as a designation for prophets, which I discuss below.

<sup>38</sup> C.f. Carroll, ‘Whose Prophet?’ 37.

intermediaries.<sup>39</sup> The biblical picture of prophets builds on this with the use of ‘call narratives’ for some prophets (e.g. 1 Sam 3; Isa 6; Jer 1:4-10; Ezek 1:4-3:11; Amos 7:14-15). Such narratives claim that prophets were not chosen for self-importance, status, or personal abilities.<sup>40</sup> Other texts have the prophets claim they were part of God’s council or circle of confidants (e.g. Amos 3:7; Jer 23:18, 22; 1 Kgs 22:19).<sup>41</sup> In comparison to the wider ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible’s focus on prophets giving unsolicited oracles without divination or consulting omens is near unique,<sup>42</sup> whereas elsewhere using omens and divination was the norm. However, there is enough evidence of biblical-like prophets and prophecies outside of ancient Israel to allow biblical prophecy to be understood as an ancient Near Eastern phenomenon.<sup>43</sup>

Prophets as God’s spokespeople brings the discussion back to the use of עֶבֶד to designate them. A spokesperson speaks on behalf of another. That is, the spokesperson does the will of another—he/she serves the other. In comparison to the portrayal of Moses, David and Israel, prophets are portrayed almost as slave-like. In both Josh-2 Kgs and prose sections of prophetic books, prophets are portrayed, when speaking on God’s behalf, as being at times subject to God’s bidding as to when and where to speak and to whom to speak (e.g. 2 Sam 12; 1 Kgs 18:1, 12, 36; Isa 7:3-9; Jer 11:1-8; 18-19; 22:1-2; 26-27; Hag 2:1-2, 10-11, 20-21).<sup>44</sup> To this can be added symbolic actions (e.g. Isa 20; Jer 13; 19; 27-29; Ezek 4-6; 12; 24:15-24) and those cases where God directs prophets’ marital affairs (Hos 1:2-9; 3:1-3; Isa 8:1-3; Jer 16:2). Thus it can be claimed that:

<sup>39</sup> So Matthews, *Social world*, 33-34; Ringgren et al, ‘עֶבֶד,’ 395; Tucker, ‘Prophetic Speech,’ 39; Marti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003) 1; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 128.

<sup>40</sup> Matthews, *Social World*, 33; c.f. Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Meindert Dijkstra, “‘I am neither a prophet nor a prophet’s pupil’: Amos 7:9-7 as the Presentation of a Prophet like Moses”, in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (Oudtestamentische Studiën 45; ed., J.C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 123.

<sup>42</sup> This can be called ‘intuitive divination’: Armin Lange, ‘Greek Seers and Israelite-Jewish Prophets’, *VT* 57 (2007) 465-468.

<sup>43</sup> For surveys, see Petersen, ‘Defining,’ 42-43; Nissinen, *Prophets*, 1-11; Lange, ‘Greek Seers,’ 461-482 (downplays the role of omen consulting in ancient Near Eastern oracle giving); Helmer Ringgren, ‘Prophecy in the Ancient Near East’, in *Israel’s Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (eds, R. Coggins, A. Phillips, M. Knibb; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 1-11. Well-known biblical-like examples are the Neo-Assyrian prophetess *Bayâ* and Wen Amun’s report of an ecstatic prophet at Byblos (11<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

<sup>44</sup> The absence of this information in poetic oracles is the problem with which Auld and Carroll are concerned.



‘A true prophet and a true ‘*ebed*’ YHWH does everything at the bidding of his God,’<sup>45</sup> and,

‘From the moment he answered Yahweh’s call, the classical prophet ceased to be a free man. He was now in bondage to the divine word. He must go where he was sent and say what he was commanded to say.’<sup>46</sup>

That is, prophets are little more than slaves: their oracles equate to doing messenger work on behalf of their master or mistress (c.f. Gen 24; 2 Sam 17:17; Prov 9:3), drawing upon the ‘work’ association of slavery. Outside of the prophetic books, the association ‘possession’ is also occasionally called into play. In 2 Kgs 9:7, God says will *avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD*. In effect, God acts as a slave master would in seeking restitution or retribution for the loss of property. The ‘messenger’ view of prophets also fits well here, since killing prophets is a snub on God, the one who sent them. However, for the reasons given above, and now the associations of slavery that can be called up with the use of עֶבֶד for prophets, ‘spokespersons’ is the better term. ‘Spokesperson’ also allows for the recognition that prophets may have had freedom in what was said. Freedom in delivering oracles is hinted at in Jer 19 and 28:12-16, both of which show what Jeremiah says is different from God’s instructions.

Despite the portrayal of prophets as עֲבָדִים in the Hebrew Bible, one aspect about them being the servants of God remains the same as for Moses, the king and Israel: they are in a close relationship with God and derive status from that relationship.<sup>47</sup> This, on the surface, does not seem to fit the facts, as many biblical prophets were persecuted and a number faced death threats or were killed (e.g. 1 Kgs 18:13; 19:2; 2 Kgs 6:32; 2 Chr 24:20-21; Jer 26; 38:25-27; Amos 7:10-13). The difficulties faced by the prophets can suggest that they were generally not respected, as Ben Zvi argues,<sup>48</sup> and adds to discussions about how prophets in the monarchic period viewed themselves. There is a persuasive view that, on the basis of Amos 7:14, pre-exilic prophets did not like to designate themselves as נְבִיא, though they accepted the verb נָבֵא (*prophecy*)<sup>49</sup> for their speaking, with נְבִיא being reserved for ‘bad’ prophets.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Ringgren et al, ‘עֶבֶד,’ 395.

<sup>46</sup> Arthur, *Smooth Stone*, 104.

<sup>47</sup> C.f. Blenkinsopp, *History*, 118; Clements, *Prophecy and Covenant*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> E. Ben Zvi, ‘The Prophets’ - References to Generic Prophets and their Role in the Construction of the Image of the “Prophets of Old” within the Postmonarchic Readerships/s of the Book of the Kings’, *ZAW* 116 (2004) 555-567.

<sup>49</sup> נָבֵא is found only in the Niphal and Hitpael stems. The latter is found mostly in group contexts, though its reflexive sense is apparent in Jer 29:26-27.

Because of the generally bad reception of the pre-exilic prophets, scholarship tends to view that *נביא* and especially *עבדי/עבדיו הנביאים* are editors' terms in the Deuteronomistic history, borrowed from its use in Jeremiah, post-exilic prophetic texts and Dt 18:15-18 and 34:10, and used to make the pre-exilic prophets appear to be successors in the tradition of Moses and Samuel.<sup>51</sup> Auld and Carroll further argue that *נביא* and *עבדי/עבדיו הנביאים* are terms introduced into both the Deuteronomistic narrative and prophetic texts by yet later editors, with all narratives about prophets (e.g. the Elijah-Elisha narratives; the narrative portions in Jeremiah; Amos 7:10-17 [and 3:7], all call narratives) being fictitious creations.<sup>52</sup>

Sifting through the biblical texts to determine what is 'early' or 'late', and what reflects the time that is portrayed in a text and what reflects the editor's view or time that the text was compiled/edited is a difficult job at the best of times. This is shown in the texts used to argue that pre-exilic prophets were poorly received and eschewed the use of *נביא* for themselves: they are supposedly Deuteronomistic or later created narratives. This is the case with Amos 7:14: it is commonly recognised as a later addition to the book. Thus there is the paradoxical situation in scholarship that narrative about prophets and the terms *נביא* and *עבדי/עבדיו הנביאים* are argued to be late additions or creations, yet it is from such narratives that arguments are made that pre-exilic prophets were rejected and they rejected the use of *נביא* for themselves. That is, narratives about prophets, despite being considered late in comparison to their oracles, reveal a more complicated picture about the reception of prophets than what Auld,

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<sup>50</sup> See, e.g. Auld, 'Prophets,' 3-23; Dijkstra, 'Neither,' 121-128'; Blenkinsopp, *Sage*, 127-129.

<sup>51</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Sage*, 127-128; Dijkstra, 'Neither,' 121-128'; Overholt, *Channels*. This idea goes back to G. von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (SBT 9; London: SCM, 1953) 83, and is affirmed in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 351. Ben Zvi, 'Prophets,' 561, fn.13, following A.F. Campbell, M.A. O'Brien, *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), rejects that YHWH's *עבדים הנביאים* is a Deuteronomistic phrase, but otherwise accepts that it is post-exilic.

<sup>52</sup> Auld, 'Prophets,' 3-23; idem, 'Prophets Through the Looking Glass: A Response to Robert Carroll and Hugh Williamson', *JSOT* 27 (1983) 41-44; idem, 'From King to Prophet in Samuel and Kings', in *The Elusive Prophet: The Prophet as a Historical Person, Literary Character and Anonymous Artist* (OtSt 45; ed., J.C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 31-44; Robert P. Carroll, 'Poets Not Prophets: A response to 'Prophets through the Looking-Glass'', *JSOT* 27 (1983) 25-31; idem, 'Whose Prophet?' 33-49. Auld and Carroll's arguments are a particular form of what most scholarship recognises about oracles in the Hebrew Bible: narratives about prophets are secondary to the oracles, under the assumption that prophets delivered their oracles orally, which were then circulated (also orally), and finally committed to writing. Sometime during the writing down process and/or incorporation into the present books of the Bible, narrative was added. What Auld and Carroll both argue is that the original oracles are anonymous and assigned to particular (fictitious) individuals later. Most scholarship accepts that the oracles assigned to a named individual prophet (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, etc) were delivered by that prophet, even if later editing has been performed on them.

Carroll, Blenkinsopp and Dijkstra indicate.<sup>53</sup> For example, the Elijah and Elisha narratives show they are accepted by many people, rejected by some, and have varied receptions by King Ahab and his successors. But all hearers are portrayed as acknowledging the two prophets' authority as YHWH's spokesmen. The same is the case for Jeremiah: nobles were divided in their response to him, as were the people (Jer 26) and officials (38:1-13); priests and court/temple prophets opposed him (20:1-2; 26:7-9) but the priest Zephaniah seemed to be sympathetic to him (29:24-32); and King Jehoiakim opposed him (36:20-26) but King Zedekiah was sympathetic, though refused to go against his nobles (38:14-27; c.f. vv.4-5). Ultimately readers of the Bible have to determine what view they will take of prophets, their oracles, and narratives about prophets: accept agnostic/sceptical views such as those of Carroll and Ben Zvi,<sup>54</sup> accept only parts of the prophetic texts as original (e.g. Auld), or accept views such as Blenkinsopp, Dijkstra and Overholt that oracles by and narratives of prophets relate what happened, but have been adjusted by Deuteronomistic editors. If one of the latter two approaches is accepted, then a decision is needed as to what criteria are used to determine what is original and what is editorial.

As one final comment on this matter there is plenty of evidence from the ancient Near East that indicates the antiquity of slave language used for temple functionaries (i.e. 'servant of [deity]') as well as worshippers of a deity.<sup>55</sup> This includes a Hebrew language seal, dated to the monarchic period, which designates a certain *מקניו עבד* as a 'servant' of YHWH (יהוה). This seal inscription seems to be an official title, and suggests the possibility that staff in the Jerusalem temple could have the cultic title, *עבד יהוה*.<sup>56</sup> The Hebrew Bible does not designate temple functionaries as *עבד יהוה* (see Chapter 4.2.11), unless *עבדי יהוה* in Pss 113:1;

<sup>53</sup> C.f. H. Lalleman - de Winkel, *Jeremiah in Prophetic Tradition: An Examination of the Book of Jeremiah in the Light of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (CBET 26; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 232. Lalleman - de Winkel also denies that Jeremiah was a Deuteronomistic author or influenced solely by Deuteronomistic concerns (p.15, fn.26). The complexity of the portrayal of the prophets is a major factor in Greene's argument against the 'prophets as messengers' theory (Greene, *Role*), though Greene himself, after noting how varied messages and message topics are, fails to draw the threads together and realise that messages are also varied in both the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East.

<sup>54</sup> Ben Zvi, 'Prophets,' 5: The nature of writing, especially in literary works means the actual words of the prophets are unrecoverable. Thus 'the socioreligious preconditions of the whole process' needs to be studied 'instead of the individual personality of the prophet'.

<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 8.2.1, fn.29.

<sup>56</sup> N. Avigad, 'The Contribution of Hebrew Seals to an Understanding of Israelite Religion and Society', in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds, P.D. Miller Jr, P.D. Hanson, S.D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 195-208. Avigad affirms F.M. Cross' speculation ('The seal of Miqnêyaw, Servant of Yahweh', in *Ancient Seals and the Bible* [eds, L. Gorelink, E. Williams-Forte; Malibu: Undena Publications, 1984] 61) that the owner of the seal was a musician.

134:1 and 135:1 refer exclusively to temple functionaries, which has been argued against in Section 8.2.1. However, as shown in Chapter 4.1, they are described as ‘serving’ God and ‘doing the work of service’. The importance of the *מַקְנִי* seal is that it shows that *עַבַּד יְהוָה* was a title for religious figures, which allows for the possibility that prophets in the pre-exilic period viewed themselves as ‘servants of YHWH’ as references such as 1 Kgs 18:36; 2 Kgs 9:7 and Amos 3:7 claim.

As the biblical texts stand, the prophets speak on God’s behalf, obey God as to when, where, how and to whom they speak. In all this, they are little more than slaves of or workers for God, even if their role is viewed as analogous to royal messengers. Yet they are clearly in relationship with God. Thus, *עַבַּד* applied to prophets emphasises both their spokesman role and status, derived from YHWH’s authority, when speaking on God’s behalf.

#### **9.2.4. *עַבַּד* used to designate the ‘Suffering Servant’ in Isaiah 40-55**

The ‘Suffering Servant’ of Isaiah 40-55 has occupied and continues to occupy the attention of scholarship and frequently dominates or is the ‘high point’ in studies on the prophets.<sup>57</sup> As noted in Chapter 4.2.11.3.5, it is not my intention to enter into debate on the identity of the ‘servant’, a matter not helped by the identification of the ‘servant’ in Isa 49:1-7 with ‘Israel’ (v.3) yet separate from ‘Israel’ (vv.5-6).

The portrayal of the Servant is generally the same as what has been discussed above for prophets in general. The four texts (Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) are clear as to the Servant’s role: he is appointed by YHWH to speak (49:1; 50:3). The texts say he fulfils his commission (that is, speaks on behalf of YHWH; 49:6; 50:5), yet is persecuted or at least not respected (49:4, 7; 50:6-9; 53:1-3, 7-9). In effect, he is a messenger-slave who is fully obedient to YHWH. Like for prophets in general, this use of *עַבַּד* for the Servant maps to slavery as both ‘possession’ and ‘work’. In contrast, however, the theme of vindication by YHWH for the Servant’s troubles is clear (49:5; 50:7-9; 53:10-12). Except for 2 Kgs 9:7,

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<sup>57</sup> See the space devoted to ‘servant of the Lord’ and the bibliography on this topic in Ringgren et al, ‘*עַבַּד* *‘abad*’,’ 376-405 (pp.398-402); and Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 11-36 (pp.25-36). See also Collins, *Mantle*, 165-180; and Bernd Janowski, Peter Stuhlmacher (eds), *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian sources* (trans., D.P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Foundational large scale English treatments are H.H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and other Essays on the Old Testament* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); and Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (London, Oxford University Press, 1956).

where God exacts revenge for the murder of prophets by Jezebel (see 1 Kgs 18:4, 13; 19:10, 14), this theme is present in a derivative manner for other prophets: they are vindicated when what they predict comes true.<sup>58</sup> This heightens what has been said about prophetic authority—it is derived from the prophets' spokesperson role for God—but makes the Servant figure more messenger-like than other prophets because YHWH's vindication of him is a direct response to the bad treatment the Servant has received.<sup>59</sup> This highlights the use of עַבְד to designate him as drawing upon the primary association of slavery.

The Servant, however, is more than just a messenger for YHWH. Language for the ideal Davidic king is applied to him (Isa 42:1-7) and he has a saviour role (42:7-8; 49:5-6; 53:4-6, 10-12) that extends to the nations (42:6; 49:6; 52:15). This portrays the Servant as a king-saviour as well as spokesperson for YHWH. That he has a close relationship with God, in similar fashion to other prophets, is indicated in 50:4, where he is described as having daily 'briefings' from YHWH. Obviously his vindication from YHWH also implies a close relationship with YHWH.

Whoever or whatever the Servant represents, this figure is the fullest expression of the persecuted prophet,<sup>60</sup> except for the messianic and king-like functions. This is in line with the general portrayal of the prophets being mostly rejected or not heeded up to the early exile, yet having status derived from their role as God's spokespeople.

### 9.2.5. עַבְד used to designate people in general

Surprisingly, עַבְד is rarely used for individual people in relation to God. It is found in Isa 54:17; 56:6; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15; and in Pss 113:1; 134:1; 135:1 (see Chapter 8.2.1). In Isaiah 56:6, עַבְד refers to foreigners who worship God, whereas in 54:17; 56:6; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15 עַבְד refers to a group of worshippers of YHWH in contrast to a group or groups within Israel who do not worship YHWH. It is usually understood that this עַבְד group refers to pious Israelites in the post-exilic period who are opposed by those in the community who do not

<sup>58</sup> Tucker, 'Prophetic Speech,' 27-40 is at pains to point out that a key role of prophecy is to predict. Blenkinsopp, *Sage*, 121 accepts this role of prophecy, but considers it a 'secondary function.'

<sup>59</sup> A good parallel is 2 Sam 10:1-5, in which David sends עַבְדִּים to Ammon and they get mistreated. That messengers are inviolable is indicated many times in Hittite, Amarna and Ugaritic diplomatic letters. Comments are frequently made that messengers are not to be detained at their destination nor be mistreated in any way.

<sup>60</sup> Collins, *Mantle*, 165-166, 174. See also Ben Zvi, 'The Prophets,' 555-567.

worship YHWH. However, a number of scholars now argue that the עבדים in Isa 56-66 are followers of the Servant of Isa 40-55 and who are opposed by certain others. Who these certain others are is debated. Blenkinsopp and Rofé argue that the opponents of the group are the majority of the community and/or those who do not worship YHWH.<sup>61</sup> Beuken adds that the ‘servants’ have a mission focus, in keeping with the Servant’s universal mission.<sup>62</sup> Berges argues (building on Blenkinsopp and Beuken) that the opponents are those in the community who wish to restrict the ‘people of God’ concept solely to descendants of the exiles who adhere to Nehemiah’s reforms.<sup>63</sup> In effect, and in contrast to Blenkinsopp and Beuken, Berges argues that the apostasy-like language used for the opponents of the עבדים in Isa 55-66 is invective rather than literal. That is, because other Israelites do not understand YHWH’s will in the same way the עבדים do, they are dismissed by the עבדים as being no better than idol worshippers.

The use of עבד for a group of YHWH worshippers is similar to its use for the patriarchs (see Section 9.2.1). That is, they are people loyal to YHWH. This is shown by the text’s claim that they worship YHWH and further YHWH’s will. This use of עבד calls up the association of slavery, ‘work’.

The unique feature with the use of עבד for a group of YHWH worshippers is that the term is applied to individuals rather than the nation or community as a whole. This makes the use of עבד similar to a major use in Psalms, where it is predominately applied to an individual voice, discussed in Chapter 8.2.1. The use of עבד for individuals also relates to the frequent use of ‘servant of [deity]’ in inscribed seals from Mesopotamia and in literary texts, a phenomenon that antedates the Israelite period.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the use of עבד for Israel, Israel’s leaders,

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, ‘The “Servants of the Lord” in Third Isaiah: Profile of a Pietistic Group in the Persian Period’, *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 7 (1983) 1-23; idem, ‘A Jewish Sect of the Persian Period’, *CBQ* 52 (1990) 5-20; idem, *History*, 192; A. Rofé, ‘Isaiah 66:1-4: Judean Sects in the Persian Period as Viewed by Trito-Isaiah’, in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry* (eds, A. Kort, S. Morschauer; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985) 205-217. Blenkinsopp, ‘Servants’, 14-17, argues that only Isa 49:1-7 refers to the Servant figure proper, with 52:13-53:12 referring to a martyred disciple of that figure.

<sup>62</sup> W.A.M. Beuken, ‘The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah: “The Servants of YHWH”’, *JSOT* 47 (1990) 67-87.

<sup>63</sup> Ulrich Berges, ‘Who were the Servants? A Comparative Inquiry in the Book of Isaiah and the Psalms’, in *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (Oudtestamentische Studiën 44; eds, J.C. de Moor; H.F. van Rooy; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 1-18.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 8.2, fn.29. The problem with ancient Near Eastern texts, seals and literary works, is they are concerned with elites. How did lower classes view themselves in relation to their diety/deities?

prophets and the Servant figure, there is no status inferred in its use for worshippers. The use of עבד in this context draws upon the derived association of slavery, 'loyalty.'

### 9.3. CONCLUSIONS

The use of עבד in prophetic literature contrasts with its use in biblical narrative for deference. In the latter, it is used to distance the relationship and put the speaker in an inferior position in relation to the hearer. My analysis in Chapters 5-7 also indicates עבד and its feminine equivalents, אמה and שפחה, can be used by speakers as an item of politeness that encourages the hearer to respond favourably to the speaker. In deference, the slave terms map slavery as 'inferior status' to the speaker's relative status to the hearer. When slavery connotations are played upon, other associations such as 'possession', 'oppression' and 'work' are often present.

In the prophetic literature, עבד starts to become a term of status, a status derived from closeness to God and loyalty/obedience to God. Israel has to be loyal to God and be a witness for God, but the nation's close relationship with God makes it an honoured nation in the world. David and Moses, as עבדים of God, are both portrayed as loyal and obedient to God and by promoting justice<sup>65</sup> and the worship of God. Prophets as עבדים are also portrayed as loyal and obedient to God, expressed by their speaking on behalf of God, often in difficult circumstances. For them, עבד does not automatically give status in the community, but their spokesperson role presupposes God's authority, which is indicated in the language of their oracles. That is, they have a status derived from God. But if God is rejected, then they are too, even though this did not stop them having a sense of authority in the community. This is also the case for the Servant figure of Isaiah 40-55, but in a heightened way. To this figure is added God's vindication (only in the background for all other prophets), a world-wide witness to God (in similar fashion to Israel), and attributes of the idealised monarchy. Thus the Servant figure merges the function of prophets, Israel's and Israel's leaders in the one person. The status that the Servant figure and the prophets have is ultimately after the event, when their messages are vindicated.

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<sup>65</sup> For Israelite ideals of the king as just, see Ps 72:12-14; Jer 21:11-12; Dt 17:18-20; and Whitlam, *The Just King*, 29-36. For how this matches with ancient Near Eastern ideals of kingship, see fn.16 above.

In contrast is the use of עֶבֶד in Isa 54 and 65 for what appears to be a group of YHWH worshippers who are opposed by people who are described with the language of apostasy. For these people, עֶבֶד is a designation of loyalty and obedience to God and carries no status. However, the theme of vindication from Isa 40-55 continues, being applied to the group, which makes understandable the desire to link the עֶבְדִּים of Isa 56-66 with the עֶבֶד of Isa 40-55. The associations of slavery that are evoked in this use of עֶבֶד are ‘work’ and ‘possession’, as well as the derived association, ‘loyalty’. This use of עֶבֶד for a group of faithful YHWH worshippers also is a rare application of the term to individuals, only found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as deference in prayer (e.g. 1 Sam 1:11 [אִמָּה]; Dan 9; Neh 1; Psalms).

Ultimately, the uses of עֶבֶד in the prophetic literature draw upon the associations of slavery, ‘work’ and ‘possession’. ‘Work’ relates to obedience to God, implied or stated, shown most clearly for the prophets and the Servant figure of Isa 40-55. To be a עֶבֶד of God is to worship God, to do what God wants, and to promote the ideals that are associated with worshipping God. ‘Possession’ relates to the relationship the prophets and the Servant have with God: they are subject to God’s direct commands as to when, where and to whom they speak. This makes their role more slave-like than for others designated with עֶבֶד. However, in all uses of עֶבֶד in the prophetic books, a close relationship with God is stated or presupposed for the person/persons who are designated with עֶבֶד, which is in contrast with its use in narrative for deference, where its function is to avoid connotations of intimacy with the hearer/hearer.



## CHAPTER 10

### עֶבֶד AS A TERM OF RELATIONSHIP

#### 10.1. SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

My analysis of the metaphoric uses of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible started with describing the biblical portrayal of slavery to find associations of that institution that were likely to be evoked when slave terms are used metaphorically in biblical texts (Chapter 3.2). These were found to be ‘possession’ (with the derived association, ‘control’), ‘inferior status’, ‘work’, ‘debt/poverty’, ‘oppression’, and ‘propensity to run away’. Of these, the last is rarely played upon in uses of slavery language in the Hebrew Bible. Despite the associations, ‘inferior status’ and ‘propensity to run away’ being present, other, derived, associations of slavery were found to be ‘loyalty’ and ‘status’ (Chapter 3.2). Both build on the association, ‘work’. These associations were determined so as to analyse each non-literal use of slave terms on its own merit, rather than apply a blanket understanding (i.e. a structural metaphor; see Chapter 4.1) across all uses.

The next task, done in Chapter 4, was to list the way in which slave terms were used outside of literal references to slavery. This would provide data for analysis, as well as show the wide variety of contexts in which slave terms are used. The list was built by starting with literal meanings of the slave terms (‘work’, then ‘slave’) and moving to the most metaphorical. The most metaphorical was determined to be their use in reference to deity, due to deity being intangible and thus an abstract concept. For each category of ‘metaphorical’ use of the terms, the associations of slavery that are evoked were listed, and synonyms, where used, were also listed. References were also made to other ancient Near Eastern texts, especially seals and letters, to show that some uses of slave terms, most notably for deference, for officials, and in reference to deity (titles and deference), were common in the ancient Near East. This gave proof that the use of slavery terms in each of these settings was lexicalised.

In chapters 5 to 7, the deferential use of slave terms in characters’ speaking in biblical narrative and in the Lachish letters were analysed. This revealed the culture of this use of the terms. The Lachish letters, being biblical period non-literary Hebrew texts, were analysed to provide a control for my analysis of the biblical texts by providing comparisons and contrasts with the biblical texts. It was found that the use of master-slave deference is high, reflecting a

stratified relationship between sender(s) and recipient. Despite this, there was also freedom for emotion, with the expected reduced deference, when a sender, junior to the recipient, is upset about his superior or about other things. The biblical narratives show a similar pattern, though the use of master-slave deference is generally less than in the Lachish letters. Comparisons, however, with other ancient Near Eastern letters (e.g. Hittite, Egyptian), indicate that the level of master-slave deference in biblical narrative appears to match what is customary in the region, except for texts such as Gen 33:4-16 and 44:18-34, in which the use of master-slave deference is very high. However, in line with the Lachish letters, characters in biblical narrative reduce the amount of master-slave deference when they get emotional, and especially when they give reasons for requests to their hearers. In this latter situation, other forms of polite speaking replaced master-slave deference, thus the reduction of deference does not indicate reduced politeness. Genesis also shows a pattern that, when master-slave deference is used, it introduces a character's speaking or turn in a dialogue, and sometimes frames it. There is also a pattern of leaving the request to last. Thus when master-slave deference frames the speaking, the request is cast also in master-slave deference. Such patterns are less noticeable in 1 and 2 Samuel, though, as found in Chapter 8.3, it is present in most prayers to God outside of Psalms. The key association of slavery that is present in master-slave deference by characters in biblical narrative is 'inferior status'. When slavery was played upon, chattel slavery was occasionally evoked (Gen 43-44, 47), or the association, 'inferior status', became reified (1 Sam 25:41).

The use of master-slave deference in the biblical narratives reveals a culture in which difference in absolute status was important. Thus speakers and hearers remain aware of their relative status to each other. When master-slave deference is used by a speaker whose social status was not less than the hearers (Abigail to David; Jacob to Esau), the deference recognises the hearer's power over the speaker. In all texts analysed, master-slave deference is an integral part of the speaker's strategy to encourage the hearer to give a favourable response. On this, identity construction is sometimes made, even to the point of deceit. David claims 'son' and 'servant' status to Nabal in 1 Sam 25:6-8 to encourage Nabal to grant him food supplies. Abigail uses master-slave deference to appeal to David not to destroy Nabal and the other men of her household. The Tekoite woman and Joab's use of 'servant' is an integral part of a text that plays on ambiguity and deceit by subjects to manipulate David into making the decision to recall his estranged son Absalom from self-imposed exile. Jacob's

deferential language in Gen 33:4-16 is part of a range of strategies that exploit the natural ambiguity in polite speech to have Esau his brother accept a gift that meant he would rescind the right of vengeance for a stolen blessing, and at the same time allow Jacob to be free of having to have any further dealing with him. Except for David to Nabal, in these situations, the use of master-slave deference adds to the ironic situation of the speaker, as the 'slave', being 'master' of the situation. They get what they want. This is usually the case for most other speakers who use master-slave deference in biblical narrative. For Jacob and Abigail, the irony goes further. Their identity construction is counter-factual to their social standing, but through it they control the interaction with their hearers.

In Psalms and other prayer (Chapter 8), the use of master-slave deference parallels the identity construction in narrative. There is a change, however. Deference in the form of 'your servant-you' is infrequent. Direct address is the norm. That is, worshippers have a sense of intimacy with God, which results in reduced politeness, as politeness theory predicts. Slave-term deference becomes simply part of an identity construction of loyalty to God, expressed in dependence on God, claims of loyalty to God, and requests that focused on removal of trouble and sin from the one praying. The key association of slavery that is evoked is the derived association, 'loyalty'. A few times, the 'possession' association is appealed to, most notably in Pss 86:16 and 116:16. It needs to be noted that Israelite and biblical culture of high deference is not forgotten in prayer. David's prayer of 2 Sam 7:18-29 is exceptionally deferential, and deference features strongly in the prayers in 1 Sam 1:11; 23:10-11; and 1 Kgs 3:6-9.

The use of servant terms to designate people in relation to God (Chapter 9) builds on my analysis of slave terms in prayer to show a further use of slave terms not yet discussed: to indicate status. Here, the intimacy that is present in prayer, and for which deference is not needed as a rule, and the 'inferior status' association of slavery that is evoked by deference come together. Those who are close to God derive status from that closeness, whether king, other leader, prophet, or temple functionary. Even when rejected by others, these people, especially prophets, maintain their claim to status due to closeness to God, evidenced by the direct language they use to others, especially high status people such as kings. Since many of the prophets' messages are critical of Israel, Judah or individual kings, it could be argued that the prophets' use of direct language represents emotion. That is, they are upset about what

their hearers are doing. But the continuation of direct language in the post-exilic prophets, in which hope and encouragement are frequently present (e.g. Hag 2:20-23; Zech 3:6-10), suggests that the prophets' role as YHWH's spokespersons is the determining factor in their style of language. In relation to the common ancient Near Eastern ideology of kings as the servant of deity, the Hebrew Bible downplays this somewhat, reserving the title only for David, once for Hezekiah, once for Zerubbabel and twice for the ideal king-like messiah in the post-exilic situation.

## **10.2. 'SERVANT': A TERM ASSOCIATED WITH THE ROYAL COURT?**

My study has worked on the principle of moving from humans using slave terms to each other to its use in relation to God. I have argued that such uses are lexicalised, helped by the common ancient Near Eastern phenomenon of using slave terms similarly, a use that antedates the biblical period. That is, for example, when 'your "slave"' and 'my "master"' is used in deference, the relationship that is evoked is that of power difference, not slavery. However, as shown, in some biblical texts associations of slavery are occasionally played upon, which proves the terms are lexicalised rather than 'dead' in these contexts. As has also been shown, one of the most common uses of עֶבֶד is for the courtiers and officials of the king, in keeping with a practice across the ancient Near East.

This raises a question: how does the use of slave language in relation to God fit with the general portrayal of God in the Hebrew Bible? I have argued in both Chapters 8.2 and 9.2.3-4 that the use of עֶבֶד for prophets and deference toward God evokes associations of 'possession' and 'inferior status' from slavery. That is, when plays are made on the language, it is chattel slavery that is evoked.

This issue became live in Chapter 9.2.3 when I discussed arguments that prophets are portrayed as analogous to messengers of the king. This relates to one of the key images of God in the Hebrew Bible: 'king'. As the Bible is currently organised, this motif appears first in Ex 19:6, in which YHWH states that Israel is to be מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים ('a kingdom of priests') amongst other things. When Israel wanted a king, there is a clear statement that God, who they are now rejecting, was their king (1 Sam 8:7; 12:12). God as 'king' images continues throughout the Bible. God is portrayed as king of Israel (e.g. Ps 149:2; Isa 44:6; Jer 17:12; Zeph 3:15; Mal

1:14) and also as king of the world (e.g. Ps 89:5-18; 110; 123:1; Isa 45:23; 66:1; Jer 10:6-10; Zeph 2:11).

There is no doubt that ‘king’ is one of the most frequent images for God. In a large scale study of this image using Black’s system of ‘associated commonplaces’, Brettler studies a range of concepts and terms that relate to royalty by association.<sup>1</sup> He argues the following associated concepts and terms used in connection with God are associated with royalty:<sup>2</sup>

- Immortality for both is included
- ‘Wise, wealthy and strong’
- Throne and ‘feet on a footstool’
- Same terms for temple and palace
- Description of heavenly and human court, including names (titles) of functionaries
- Judge and builder
- Some traditions: access to God and king is limited, and a fearful experience
- Bowing down, ‘guard duty’ terms
- Tithes and maybe other gifts to the temple
- Some aspects of enthronement rituals
- The use of אֲדֹנִי (‘my master’) as a surrogate for when pronouncing יהוה was taboo
- Use of ‘attendants’ (which Brettler argues function as ‘royal spies’ from the post-exilic experience of Israel
- ‘God built the temple,’ which Brettler notes is not the case – humans built it
- ‘God is handsome’

Some of these concepts have been touched on in Chapter 8, especially enthronement rituals. Scholarship has long noted the use of הֵיכָל, ‘palace’, for the temple, and that it is derived from Canaanite god-king ideas.<sup>3</sup> The argument that prophets function as royal messengers, discussed in Chapter 9.2.3, assumes that royal court imagery has been transferred into the

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Z. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSS 76; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989). See Chapter 2.2.3 for brief comments on this work.

<sup>2</sup> Listed in Brettler, *God is King*, 161.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. Joe Uziel, Itzhaq Shai, ‘Iron Age Jerusalem: Temple-Palace, Capital City’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127:2 (2007) 161-170; Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) 24-26.

divine realm in texts such as 1 Kgs 22:19-23; Isa 6:3; 40; Jer 23:18, 22.<sup>4</sup> The matter of the use of אֲדֹנָי will be discussed below.

Brettler also does the service of discussing when the ‘God is king’ metaphor does not directly map to God. Examples are: God’s absolute justice; eternal nature; incomparable strength; unlimited resources; king over everything; gigantesque descriptions of throne, palace, number of courtiers and so on. Brettler notes that for these images, the metaphor ‘God is king’ is combined with the theological metaphor, ‘God is incomparable.’<sup>5</sup> Other tensions of the ‘God is king’ metaphor are: the use of אֲדֹנָי; the absence of God being called the ‘head’ of Israel (contrast Isa 7:8-9); apostasy is pictured as rebellion against an overlord rather than rebellion within a kingdom; the absence of the language of ‘anointing’ and ‘election’ (despite, as discussed in Chapter 8, much scholarship on Psalms arguing that an annual enthronement of God took place in ancient Israel<sup>6</sup>), typical language for kings and king-like figures; and the use of the language of strength (‘arm’, ‘might’, ‘right hand’, etc) for the purposes of peace, compassion, mercy and so on.<sup>7</sup> What Brettler points out is that such language, even if used beyond normal commonplace associations for royalty, still reflects royal language and concepts applied to God.

Brettler has not said anything new regarding God being portrayed as king in the Hebrew Bible. His contribution to this topic is, using metaphor theory, to show how pervasive this understanding of God is in the Bible. I do not argue against this, but I wish to argue that master-slave terms used in relation to God are not associated with ‘king’; rather they are their own metaphor, just as there are many other metaphors for God in the Hebrew Bible. Well known examples are ‘husband/lover’, ‘creator’ (of both individual worshippers and Israel as a nation), ‘father’ (usually expressed as Israel as a rebellious child), ‘redeemer/saviour’, ‘shepherd’, and ‘rock/refuge/stronghold.’ ‘Shepherd’ is well known as an ancient Near

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<sup>4</sup> As indicated in Chapter 9.2.3, those who argue this are James F. Ross, ‘The Prophet as Yahweh’s Messenger’, in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (The Preacher’s Library; eds, B.W. Anderson, W. Harrelson; London: SCM Press, 1962) 98-107; J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), and W. Zimmerli, J. Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (SBT; transs, H. Knight, J. Jeremias and others; SCM, 1965) 24.

<sup>5</sup> Brettler, *God is King*, 162-163.

<sup>6</sup> Brettler, *God is King*, 166, addresses this issue, arguing that the ‘enthronement psalms’ may show literary conceit rather than an existing ritual in the cult, in much the same way that God ‘built’ the temple is also a literary conceit.

<sup>7</sup> Brettler, *God is King*, 163-164.

Eastern image for the king, and so relates to the image of God as ‘king,’<sup>8</sup> but Brettler argues that ‘creator’ is also an associated commonplace with royalty. This might be so, but ‘creator’ connotes ‘possession’ by virtue that whoever makes something (or employs someone to make it for them) has the right of ownership and therefore control over it unless they dispose of it.<sup>9</sup> In many places in the Bible, particularly in Psalms and prophetic texts, images are juxtaposed with each other, or directly paralleled, or changed from one to another to present the text’s message. A good example is Malachi, where ‘king’, ‘father’, ‘(slave) master’ and ‘Creator’ are all used. In these texts, the point is not made by stressing one metaphor for God over another, but to use them as rhetoric in the argument/s being presented.

I have already argued in Chapter 8.2.1 that the use of עבד in Psalms for deference toward God is not a royal term, and arguments that it is a royal term are weak. This is also the case with Brettler’s argument that אדון is also a royal term. He himself is forced to acknowledge, on grammatical grounds, that אדני as applied to God goes beyond kingship associations to suggest God is more than king.<sup>10</sup> Revell, in his study of deferential language in Judges-2 Kings, argues that master-slave deference to God remains modelled on the master-slave relationship, not the king-subject relationship.<sup>11</sup> A survey of Judges-2 Kings shows that Revell’s argument has some merit. People in a formal relationship with a social superior (e.g. servant to a master, official/courtier to the king) rarely use אדני to the superior, though they may use עבדך\עבדיך to designate themselves.<sup>12</sup> It is people such as subjects to a king, or social equals engaging in identity construction in the context of requests, who use master-slave language most fully, such as I have discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. This is not to deny that אדני

<sup>8</sup> Brettler, *God is King*, 25; H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1948) 237-238, citing texts.

<sup>9</sup> This is reflected in Hittite and early Mesopotamian incantation prayers. When sin is the theme, the worshipper, using the prayer, applies the ‘god is creator’ metaphor as part of an appeal for sin to be shown so the appropriate sacrifice of atonement can be offered. See, e.g. Hans G. Güterbock, ‘Hittite parallels’, *JNES* 33 (1974) 323-327; W.G. Lambert, ‘Dingir.sa.dib.ba Incantations.’ *JNES* 33 (1974) 267-270, 272-322. Such prayers indicate that metaphor, ‘God/deity is creator’ is ancient, and in most cases, like the use of master-slave language outside of references to slavery, is lexicalised, except when played upon.

<sup>10</sup> Brettler, *God is King*, 163.

<sup>11</sup> E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) 37-38, 214-215, 320. Revell also argues (p.320) that the the parent-child relationship was the original metaphor for divine-human relations, eclipsed by the master-slave relationship metaphor. Job Y. Jindo, ‘Toward a Poetics of the Biblical Mind: Language, Culture, and Cognition’, *VT* 59 (2009) 236-242, also shows the importance of the parent-child relationship as a metaphor for Israel’s relationship with God, and how this intertwines with the ‘God is king’ metaphor.

<sup>12</sup> An exception occurs in 2 Kgs 6:12, by a עבד of the king of Aram. He uses אדני at the beginning of his response to the king’s accusation that one of his עבדים is a spy for the king of Israel.

is used in deference to the king; rather to show that, like for עַבֵּד in deference, it is not a term that is solely associated with royalty.

Part of the problem with master-slave language being considered as royal terminology or not is that in biblical narrative, עַבֵּד is used frequently to denote subjects, courtiers and officials of the king (see Chapter 4.2.6). I have also indicated in Chapter 8.1 that such language reflects customary (and ancient) ancient Near Eastern practice, thus is a lexicalised use of the term, unless the narrative plays on the associations of slavery, ‘work’ and ‘inferior status’. The question can then be asked, does the use of slave terms in deference to God (and to others) reflect this customary use of deference to royalty, or would it call to mind to ancient Israelites the institution of slavery?

The use of slave terms, both ‘slave’ and ‘lord’, in deference goes back to at least the earliest extant letters. In the Sargonic and Third Dynasty of Ur periods (2330-2000 BCE), letters to superiors are addressed with *lugal-mu* (‘[tell] my lord’; lit, ‘[tell] the king’)<sup>13</sup> or with *beli* (‘my master/lord’).<sup>14</sup> As Michalowski shows in his translations of a selection of letters, it is difficult to know when *lugal-mu* means the letter is addressed to the king or is simply being used as an honorific to a social superior. The same occurs with *beli*: both examples Michalowski gives are translated as referring to the king, helped by *lugal-mu* being used as a parallel in §§ 25.<sup>15</sup> The opposite for *lugal-mu* is not a term that denotes ‘small’ in contrast to ‘great’, but *árad-zu*, ‘your servant/slave’.<sup>16</sup> *Árad* is the standard term for a male slave/servant in these letters, as it is also in Akkadian.<sup>17</sup> The use of the terms shows that, first, ‘master’ (here, *beli*) was already used in this early time as an honorific for a king. Second, ‘slave’ was already a term for self-deference by a social inferior. Third, *lugal* (‘king’) was already used as an honorific to a social superior not a king, and thus early took on the meaning ‘lord’. What is suggested by these terms in this early period is that king-subject/official relationships were modelled on the master-slave relationship rather than a ‘great person-small person’ model.

<sup>13</sup> Piotr Michalowski, *Letters from Early Mesopotamia* (SBLWAW 3; Atlanta, 1993) §§ 6, 30, 32, 75, 77-79, 96-97.

<sup>14</sup> Michalowski, *Letters*, §§ 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> Michalowski, *Letters*: for *lugal-mu* as understood to be addressed to the king, see §§ 75, 77-79, 96-97; for *lugal-mu* as not understood to be addressed to the king, see §§ 6, 30, 32.

<sup>16</sup> This is found only in § 96 in deference in Michalowski, *Letters*.

<sup>17</sup> Michalowski, *Letters*, §§ 8, 10, 12, 41, 55, 58, 59,



Obviously, as master-servant language for the king-subject/official became common, it is possible that the master-slave model became lost in people's consciousness. I argue that this did not entirely happen. The repeated refrain by vassals in the Amarna correspondence, *I am your loyal servant* (Akkadian, *árad*) to the Egyptian king in the context of vassalage, suggests the vassals evoke associations of slavery, not royal service. I have argued in Chapter 3.2 that this is also the case when master-slave language is used for vassalship in biblical texts. And in Chapters 6-9, I have argued for a number of texts that when the metaphoricity of master-slave deference, or the use of slave terms as a title, is played upon, it is associations with slavery that are evoked, not associations with service to the king. This is helped by the fact that across the ancient Near East and in the biblical texts, the standard terms for 'slave' continued to be used for servants and a king's officials and courtiers, and in deference, rather than other words being used. Biblical Hebrew certainly had the opportunity to use other terms, as the common use of נַעַר for 'personal servant' and for some people in the service of the king shows, listed in Chapter 4. An ancient Hebrew seal uses נַעַר instead of the more usual עבד denoting an official of the king.<sup>18</sup> אִישׁ could also have been used more frequently, as it is occasionally for prophets in relation to God (e.g. 1 Sam 9:5-10; 1 Kgs 13:1-32; 2 Kgs 4:9, 15). אִישׁ was also used by pre-Israelite period Canaanites to denote retainers or personal servants.<sup>19</sup> It seems that for some reason, the hierarchical nature of ancient Near Eastern and biblical societies was felt to be best expressed with master-slave language.

The idea that the language of the court, including master-slave language, has influenced all uses of such language in other contexts, except for slavery, has not gone unchallenged. I have already noted Revell's argument that master-slave deference to God is modelled on the master-slave relationship, not the king-subject relationship. Likewise, Callender argues, in relation to the creation of humanity in Sumerian and Akkadian texts, that human-divine relations are modelled on the model of 'unpaid servitude on behalf of another;' that is a master-slave relationship. Humans were created as servants of the gods; that is, 'man was created to work not simply in place of the gods, but on their behalf – to do work of direct benefit to them.'<sup>20</sup> Callender argues this view of human-divine relationship is derived from

<sup>18</sup> W.F. Albright, 'The Seal of Eliakim and the Latest Preëxilic History of Judah, with Some Observations on Ezekiel', *JBL* 51 (1932) 77-106.

<sup>19</sup> Frank M. Cross, 'The Arrow of Suwar, Retainer of 'Abday', *EI* 25 (1996) 9\*-17\*.

<sup>20</sup> D.E. Callender, 'Servants of God(s) and Servants of Kings in Israel and the Ancient Near East', *Semeia* 83/84 (1998) 71-72. C.f. K. Baltzer, 'Liberation from Debt Slavery after the Exile in Second Isaiah and Nehemiah', in

the situation at the times the creation texts were composed (or modified), which by time the concept of divine king had arisen—agricultural practices and corvée labour—but it is noteworthy that he argues that the institution of slavery is the model, not the court, with the court replicating the former. Lemche, in discussing the political organisation of pre-Israelite period Canaanite city states, argues,

‘A number of studies of LBA society in Syria and Palestine have demonstrated that [the LBA city-state political structure] was formed around political centres which were organized as palatine states, with the king as the general director or the business of industry which was really the palace, and the rest of society as his slaves.’<sup>21</sup>

Lemche goes on to summarise Liverani’s study of the political organisation revealed in the Amarna letters: such city states were organised as the ruler as ‘patron’ to his subjects and his subjects not being subject to him as such but rather ‘clients’. In empires, patronage can be nested: the overlord is a patron to the vassal, and the vassal is patron to the villages/cities in his control.<sup>22</sup> The relevance of Lemche’s study is that in his and Liverani’s analysis of pre-Israelite society, the use of עַבְד for subjects and officials of the king evokes chattel slavery rather than the court. Given that much scholarship argues that the Israelites took over Canaanite (and wider ancient Near East) thinking and practice, including royal ideology, and if arguments such as Callender and Lemche’s hold true, the use of עַבְד for subjects and officials and for deference may, though lexicalised, still evokes slavery rather than the court. On this, as I have also noted above for vassalship situations, both the Amarna letters and biblical texts view vassalship as slavery, not royal service, and when the biblical texts play on the metaphoric use of master-slave terms, associations with chattel slavery are always evoked.

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*Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (eds, P.D. Miller Jr, P.D. Hanson, S.D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 478-479.

<sup>21</sup> Niels P. Lemche, ‘From Patronage Society to Patronage Society.’ In *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States* (eds, V. Fritz, P.R. Davies; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996) 112.

<sup>22</sup> Lemche, ‘Patronage,’ 113. See also Mario Liverani, *Three Amarna Essays* (Monographs on the ANE 1/5; Lancaster: Undena, 1979). Lemche uses this material to add another argument to his well-known view that the united monarchy as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible is fictitious (see ‘Patronage,’ 120, and *Prelude to Israel’s Past: Background and Beginnings of Israelite History and Identity* [trans. E.F. Maniscalco; Peabody: Hendricksen, 1998]; c.f. Keith W. Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* [New York: Routledge, 1996]). In such a patronage view, taxes and other service to the king equate with the obligations a client is expected to do to show support for and loyalty to the patron. In this, the use of slave terms for officials and subjects evokes the derived association of slavery, ‘loyalty.’ 1 Sam 22:7 may reflect that patronage was part of royal bureaucracy, with fiefs offered as reward for good service, as may 2 Chr 11:23 with its comment that Rehoboam placed some of his sons in charge of some fortified cities.

Ultimately, this matter comes down to emphasis: what associations are evoked with the use of slave terms in deference and for designating people such as subjects and officials of the king? Do we agree with Callender, Lemche, Baltzer, Revell and Leeb<sup>23</sup> that the structure of ancient Near Eastern and biblical courts was based on chattel slavery and therefore the use of master-slave language continues to recall this original basis? Or do we agree with Brettler, Ross and Zimmerli<sup>24</sup> that the original basis of slavery was forgotten in the organisation of the court and so the metaphoric use of master-slave language evokes the court, not slavery?

Despite the pervasiveness of 'king' as a metaphor for God, there are references and images for divine-human relationships in the Hebrew Bible that directly evoke associations of slavery. In Ex 19:5-6, the image of סגולה ('treasured possession'; v.5) for Israel appears, juxtaposed with the image of God as king ('you shall be for me a priestly kingdom'; v.6). The former image connotes ownership, such as that implied by virtue of God as creator—or slave master, despite Brettler's argument that possession is an association with royalty.<sup>25</sup> Slavery associations are evoked explicitly in Mal 1:6, in which God, through the prophet, asks rhetorically (to priests),

*A son honors his father, and a servant (עבד) his master (אדוני). If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master (אדוני), where is my respect? ...*<sup>26</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 9.2.1 and listed in Chapter 4.2.11.1, Israel is frequently designated as the עבד of God. As Baltzer points out, the language in Isaiah 40-55 of Israel going into exile and returning is that of being sold into slavery and being redeemed back (e.g. Isa 50:1; 52:3; 43:34; 44:5).<sup>27</sup> In Deuteronomy, the verb form of עבד is used frequently for Israel as obligated to worship God instead of other deities. When עבד in deference to God in Psalms plays on the metaphoricity of עבד, slavery is also evoked (Pss 86:16; 116:16); helped by the image in Ps

<sup>23</sup> Carolyn S. Leeb, 'Polygyny - Insights from Rural Haiti', in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in its Social Context* (ed., P.F. Esler; London: SCM, 2005) 50-65.

<sup>24</sup> Ross, 'The Prophet,' 98-107; Zimmerli, *Servant of God*, 11-36.

<sup>25</sup> The vassal kings to Egypt in the Amarna letters also frequently, as part of their appeals for Egyptian military help, claim that their territories are the possession of the Egyptian king. Again, should 'possession' be understood as an association with the king, or is it in keeping with the vassals' calling up of the institution of slavery in their master-slave deference, as I've argued?

<sup>26</sup> Note the plurals for אדון. Douglas Stuart, 'Malachi', in *The Minor Prophets Vol 3: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (ed., T.E. McComiskey; Grand Rapids Baker, 1998) 1296, argues that the plurals indicate the abstract. He also notes that אדון is mostly found in the plural in the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>27</sup> Baltzer, 'Liberation,' 479. Baltzer notes parallels of this concept are found in Judg 2:14; 3:8; 4:1. In these references, the association of slavery, 'possession' maps to military defeat and 'oppression' maps to the rule over Israel by the victors.

123 of worshippers as personal servants waiting on their master or mistress being applied to waiting for God to intervene in a difficult situation. That is, as I have argued, the metaphorical use of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible, whether for deference, courtiers, kings, prophets and so on, is lexicalised language drawn from the institution of slavery.

### **10.3. CONCLUSION: THE ‘SLAVE’ IS THE MASTER’: SLAVERY TERMINOLOGY FOR RELATIONSHIPS**

There is no doubt that the use of slave terms in the Hebrew Bible to designate people before others (e.g. courtiers, officials and subjects to a king, vassal king to an overlord), God (kings, prophets, significant others, Israel as a nation, individual worshippers) and in deference, both to humans and to God, expresses relationship, such as Baltzer and Zimmerli contend. However, unlike Baltzer’s claim that all relationships are qualitatively the same,<sup>28</sup> the terms cover *different* types of relationships, each evoking an association or combination of associations of slavery. Similar occurs when slave terms are used in deference. The associations of slavery evoked in deference to humans and in deference to God are different. The former context predominately evokes the association ‘inferior status’, while the latter context predominately evokes the association, ‘loyalty’ and ‘possession’. Yet within these two contexts, the specific context or subject matter of speaking and praying determines whether these or other associations of slavery evoked.

The long history of the use of slave terms in deference and for designations of people means that in most cases in biblical texts, the terms were lexicalised. That is, biblical writers and ancient Israelites would not have thought consciously of any associations of slavery that could be evoked in any particular use of the terms. Thus the associations drawn out in my study of the use of slave terms in deference and use of these terms in relation to God may be latent, that is present and ready to be evoked, rather than consciously thought of by the biblical writers. However, in these settings, the potential for associations of slavery to be played upon is higher than when they are simply used to designate people as servants or in the service of the king.

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 3.2.1, fn.9, for others who understand the metaphoric uses of slave terms in a similar fashion.

When עבד is used for the people as subjects of their king, associations of slavery in this use ready to be evoked are ‘work’ and ‘inferior status’. The same is the case for when עבד is used for courtiers and officials of the king. However, these people have status in the wider community as a result of their association with power. However, it needs to be recognised that is a derived status. This is heightened by increased status when rank increases, due to increased closeness to the king. Status due to association with power maps to a recognition even in the ancient world that a slave carries his master’s authority when on his master’s business (c.f. David’s officials in 2 Sam 10:1-5). But a form of ‘intimacy’ is also evoked by status, since high officials could also influence their king in the role of counsellors and advisors (see examples in Chapter 4.2.6), notwithstanding the fact that they are continually in the presence of their king. It is this aspect of the king relationship, along with the recognition of the domestic nature of ancient slavery, that Baltzer and Zimmerli use in their arguments that ‘slavery’ is a relationship term, and all non-literal uses of slave terms are qualitatively the same. Thus, עבד in these uses strongly indicate relative status between people and mark biblical period Israelite culture as hierarchical. This is also shown in the deference used by the Lachish letter writers to their socially superior recipient.

Similar is the case when עבד is used to designate people in relation to God. The associations of slavery ready to be evoked are also ‘work’ and ‘inferior status’, along with ‘loyalty’. ‘Loyalty’ is frequently emphasised in the biblical texts, especially for David, Moses, patriarchs and prophets for their role in the promotion of the worship of God. Like for high officials to the king, they are recognised as being close to God, which gives status, but as for officials, it is a derived status. But in the case of prophets, the nature of their role as spokespersons for God brings into play yet another, this time the association of slavery: ‘possession’. This relates to God’s directing of them in where to go, whom to speak, what to say, and in some cases, their private lives. When עבד is applied to Israel in the prophetic texts, the association that is evoked is ‘possession’. This is usually made explicit: Israel is a possession that God has ‘sold’ as a slave into exile and ‘redeems’ from exile. But status is also inherent in this language. Because God is unique and powerful in the created world, Israel has the derived status because of being owned by such a god.

The use of עבד for vassalship picks up most associations of slavery: ‘work’, ‘inferior status’, ‘loyalty’, ‘possession’ and ‘oppression’. The last association evokes the powerlessness of the

slave to free him or herself from the situation: the vassal cannot be free from the overlord except by rebellion or finding yet another overlord. The biblical texts frequently play on the slavery associations evoked by vassalship, to the point that it is viewed at the same level as the institution from which the language of vassalship is drawn upon: a 'real' slavery.

All these uses of slave terms highlight status differences between the one designated with or in the role of עֶבֶד and the one designated with or in the role of אֲדֹנָי. Common to these mostly lexicalised uses of the terms lie the associations of slavery, 'work' and 'inferior status'. When status is part of a 'servant' designation, it is always derived, but ideas of intimacy with the other (the אֲדֹנָי) become present. When slave terms are used for vassalship, most associations with slavery are evoked, which makes this use of slave terms to designate the relationship essentially the same as chattel slavery.

In master-slave deference, whether to humans or to God, there is one association of slavery that is present ready to be evoked: 'inferior status'. All situations in which master-slave deference is used show that the hearer has power over the speaker. The hearer grants a request, forgives, or makes a decision on a matter. As for the use of עֶבֶד as a designation for people of Israel in relation to God, there is a difference between deference to humans and deference to God. For the former, it always is associated with 'inferior status.' Deference works by the speaker humbling and abasing him/herself and raising the hearer up by treating him/her as superior, and recognises that the hearer has power over the speaker.<sup>29</sup> In biblical texts, when the metaphoricity of 'your servant' is played upon, it always evokes the 'inferior status' association of slavery (1 Sam 25:8, 41; 2 Sam 14:22; 19) though in some texts in Genesis, the whole experience of being a slave is evoked (Gen 43-44, 47). The same is the case in the Lachish Letters, and can be argued to be the case in the deferential language of human interaction in the wider ancient Near East.

When deference to God using slave terms is given, not only is the 'inferior status' association of slavery present to be evoked, but also the association, 'loyalty'. The latter association is frequently played upon in prayer, especially in Psalms, to construct an identity that the one praying is a loyal and devoted worshipper of God/YHWH. This continues when failings are

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<sup>29</sup> Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (SIS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 178

mentioned, with the use of deference in the context of requests for *help* to be loyal and obedient. The association, ‘possession’, is occasionally appealed to, as yet a further argument for God to answer favourably. By this, the worshipper, in prayer, actualises the relationship with God implied in the use of slave terms to designate that relationship. Where a psalm reflects the prayer of the group/nation, the use of slave terms in deference has the same associations. However, despite how master-slave deference assists in prayer, it is used relatively infrequently, implying that the relationship between God and worshipper/group of worshippers is intimate. This makes deference marked, showing that it is a deliberate strategy of appeal (i.e. rhetoric).

The use of slave terms in deference to assist the construction of an identity in prayer also occurs in deference to humans in narrative texts. Such a use makes reading and the interpreting of texts interesting. Master-slave deference is used to create a false persona (the Tekoite woman to David, Jacob to Esau), to downplay equality (Abigail to David, Jacob to Esau), to manipulate (the Tekoite woman to David) and to express thanks after difficult requests have been granted (Abigail to David, Joab to David). Further examples, not discussed, are: master-slave deference is used to deliberately deceive (Absalom to David, 2 Sam 13:24 and 15:8; Ziba to David, 2 Sam 16:1-4), to deal with ‘accounts’ (i.e. prior face loss caused to the hearer; Shimei and Mephibosheth to David in 2 Sam 19) and to refuse politely a king’s request (Barzillai in 2 Sam 19). In some of these cases, a ‘counterfactual scenario’ is created; that is, the character does not speak or behave as one would normally expect (e.g. Abigail, Jacob, Joab<sup>30</sup>). In keeping with the biblical portrayal of inferiors making requests of social superiors, all cases of the use of master-slave deference for characters in biblical narrative, except for David to Nabal and Joseph’s brothers as a group to the unknown-to-them Joseph, have the inferior get a favourable response from the superior. This also occurs for master-slave deference in prayer. Such responses by the hearer in the counter-factual settings show the power of master-slave deference: the one who uses it, the ‘slave’, is the ‘master’ of the situation, not the socially superior hearer.

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<sup>30</sup> As discussed in Chapter 6.3.2.5, Joab’s deference to David should be expected as that of an official to his king, but in 1-2 Samuel, he is normally portrayed as direct with David. That is, his obsequiousness in 2 Sam 14:22 is marked as unusually polite.

The use of slave terms outside the context of slavery highlight that ancient Israel was a society in which power relations were unequal (in keeping with the ancient Near East). Those people who are designated with עבד (or אמה and שפחה) are always in the inferior position in relation to an other who is in the role of אדון (e.g. a king, God). This includes Israel in relation to God. When slave terms are used in deference to others or to God in prayer, the sense of inferiority to the other remains. The speaker takes the self-abasive role whereas the hearer is lifted up as the superior. However, outside of 'inferior status' association of slavery, the context of use determines what other associations may be evoked by עבד and its equivalents. Some uses evoke chattel slavery in its entirety (e.g. vassalship), other uses evoke 'possession' (deference in prayer, prophets as עבדים of God), others 'loyalty' (in prayer, subjects to the king), and yet the use of עבד for officials and prophets evokes a sense of intimacy with the other because of high status. Master-slave deference can also be used to create identities not true for the person concerned, so that the purpose of the speaking/praying will be accepted by the hearer or God.



## APPENDIX

### EXCURSES ON FEMALE SLAVE TERMS AND SELF-ABASEMENT IN THANKS

In my analysis of slave terms, I have considered the two female equivalents to עַבְדָּה, אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה, as synonyms to each other. Section 1 in this Appendix engages an ongoing discussion about possible distinctions in meaning, and argues that אִמָּה and שִׁפְחָה should be understood as exact synonyms, though there is some variation of use, both across the Hebrew Bible and in individual context.

In Chapters 3, 5, 6, and 8, mention has been made about the use of self-abasement in the context of thanks. Section 2 provides the necessary discussion to back up my comments.

Section 1.1, ‘Slave Woman vs. Slave Woman: *’āmâ* (אִמָּה) and *šiphâ* (שִׁפְחָה) in the Hebrew Bible,’ is a manuscript being prepared for submission for publication as a journal article. Section 1.2 is the text of a paper, ‘Self-Abasement in the Context of Thanks in the Old Testament’, presented at the Second Annual Australian Conference for the Academy and the Church, held in Brisbane, 29 June – 2 July 2010. It is intended to rework this paper for publication as a journal article. Because of the focus of the conference, I use ‘Old Testament’ instead of ‘Hebrew Bible’, even though the paper works with the Hebrew text.

#### 1.1. DEBATE ON THE MEANINGS OF THE FEMALE SLAVE TERMS, אִמָּה AND שִׁפְחָה

##### Introduction

*Then she [Rachel] said, “Here is my maid [אִמָּה] Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear children upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.” So she gave him her maid [שִׁפְחָה] Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went into her. (Gen 30:3-4; NRSV).*

*She [Abigail] rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said, “Your servant [אִמָּה] is a slave [שִׁפְחָה] to wash the feet of the servants [עַבְדִּים] of my lord [David].” (1 Sam 25:41; NRSV)*

These two verses in the Hebrew Bible encapsulate an issue in biblical studies that is ongoing: the possible distinction in meaning between the two Hebrew terms for ‘slave woman’, אִמָּה

and שפחה. The two terms are used synonymously in these verses, yet it is possible to argue for a distinction in meaning between them in each verse. Edelman, for example, understands שפחה in 1 Sam 25:41 to denote a more menial status than אמה.<sup>1</sup> This is similar to Jepsen's view that שפחה primarily denotes personal service to a mistress, whereas אמה is a broader term, covering also a slave wife,<sup>2</sup> which suits the use of אמה in Rachel's speaking.

This matter, the non-resolution of the possible distinction in meaning is occasioned by a number of issues. One is the clear use of אמה and שפחה as synonyms. This is evidenced by the use of both terms to designate slave women in general (e.g. Nah 7:8[7] and Lev 25:44 for אמה and 1 Sam 8:16 and Dt 28:68 for שפחה), and the swapping of the two terms for Hagar between Gen 16:2-5 (שפחה) and 21:10-13 (אמה), and for Bilhah and Zilpah in 33:1, 6 (שפחה) and 30:3 (אמה). Yet (a second issue) is that patterns of use occur. אמה predominates in legal texts and שפחה predominates in possession lists and when slave women are mentioned in relation to the mistress. A third issue is that שפחה has yet to be found in biblical period epigraphic remains. אמה appears in a biblical period Hebrew tomb inscription and a seal inscription, as well as in Canaanitic languages, being found in two Ammonite seals and in Ugaritic texts. The Aramaic equivalent also appears in the fifth century Elephantine papyri and fourth century Samaritan slave sale contracts. The Akkadian equivalent, *amtu* (cuneiform logogram, GÉME) is found in a wide variety of text types, including the Amarna letters. This lack of evidence of the use of שפחה outside the Bible begs the question where the term originated, and whether it carries a distinct meaning from אמה and its cognates or may reflect fossilised slang.

It is my contention that discussion on this topic has been inadequate. Dictionaries and lexica cannot be expected to provide detailed argument for distinction between terms,<sup>3</sup> though large works do give some discussion.<sup>4</sup> But, as Hoftijzer and Jongeling comment, 'Unfortunately a

<sup>1</sup> Diana V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOTSS 121; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 216.

<sup>2</sup> A. Jepsen, 'Amah und Schiphchah', *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958) 293-297.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. A. Briggs, W. Gesenius, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979 [1907]), 51, 1046; D.J.A. Clines (ed.), *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, Vol. 1), 309-310. *DCH* gives no dictionary meaning for אמה.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., E. Reuter, 'שִׁפְחָה šiphâ', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (eds, G.J. Botterweck et al; trans. D. E. Green; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006, Vol. 15), 405-410; Richard Schultz, 'אִמָּה, 'āmâ', in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed., W. A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997, Vol 1), 419; idem, 'שִׁפְחָה, Šíphâ', in *The New International Dictionary of Old*

dictionary does not give the opportunity to present arguments for one's preferences.<sup>5</sup> Short articles by Jepsen and Fensham appeared in the mid twentieth century and are frequently cited.<sup>6</sup> A number of scholars have discussed the matter incidentally, and while useful, lack the advantage of a full-scale discussion.<sup>7</sup> Of these, Younger provides a short review of existing scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Recent dictionaries and lexica, and commentaries, are content to follow previous scholarship.<sup>9</sup> This is usually the case when the matter is discussed incidentally.<sup>10</sup> There have been no full length discussions on the matter, except for Cohen's 1979 article.<sup>11</sup> Being in Hebrew, Cohen's article is inaccessible to most English speaking scholarship.

This study is in three parts. The first lists the main proposals for distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה. The second section discusses the terms and interacts with the proposals. This is done by distinguishing between the descriptive use of the terms and their use as deference in discourse. Previous proposals fuse these two uses together, which adds confusion to the matter. I will argue that there is no difference in meaning between אמה and שפחה, but there are contexts in which one term is favoured. The third section discusses possible reasons why such favouring of one term occurs.

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*Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed., W. A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997, Vol 4), 212 (provides a chart of three views). Surprisingly, *TDOT* does not have an entry for אמה.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hoftijzer, K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1995) xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Jepsen, 'Amah,' 293-297; F. Charles Fensham, 'The Son of a Handmaid in Northwest Semitic', *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969) 312-322.

<sup>7</sup> E.J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Narrative* (CBET 14; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 38; Lipiński, Édouard, 'Kinship Terminology in 1 Sam 25.40-42', *Zeitschrift für Althebräistik* 7 (1994) 15; Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (trans. M. Kohl; London: SCM, 1974), 199; Nahman Avigad, *Bullae and Seals from a Post-exilic Judean Archive* (Qedem 4; Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976), 11-12; Ingrid Riesener, *Der Stamm 'bd in Alten Testament. Eine Wortuntersuchung unter Berücksichtigung neuerer sprachwissenschaftlicher Methoden* (BZAW 149; Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1979) 83; E. Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws* (London: Longmans, Green, 1944) 121-124, cited in Fensham, 'The Son,' 314.

<sup>8</sup> K. Lawson Younger, 'Two Comparative Notes on the Book of Ruth', *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 26 (1998): 126.

<sup>9</sup> See discussion below, and fns 12-18 for the literature.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Revell follows Cohen; and Younger acknowledges dependency on the scholarship which follows Jepsen.

<sup>11</sup> C. (H. R.) Cohen, 'Studies in Extra-biblical Hebrew Inscriptions I: The Semantic Range and Usage of the Terms אמה and שפחה', *Shnaton* 5-6 (1979): XXV-LIII.

**Proposed distinctions in meaning between אמה and שפחה**

*Brown-Driver-Briggs* in its brief listings for אמה and שפחה proposed that שפחה is used in some contexts in which menial service is emphasised.<sup>12</sup> Edelman reflects this proposal in her interpretation of 1 Sam 25:41. This understanding proposes that slave women who do menial service are of lower status than those who do not do such service. Ex 11:5, 1 Sam 25:41 and 2 Sam 17:17 are cited in support.

A proposal which goes back to Neufeld but is advocated by Fensham and *TDOT* and accepted by Avigad, is that שפחה refers to status, namely, a slave woman of the lowest possible status.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, אמה can denote a slave woman who has a higher status. It is essentially a variation of the *BDB* proposal, but gives שפחה a broader context of designation.

Jepsen argues that שפחה primarily refers to an unmarried woman who gives personal service to a mistress, whereas אמה is a broader term, covering also a slave wife. This view has proved influential, accepted by some commentators, *TWOT* and *HALOT*.<sup>14</sup> Westermann and Wenham also understand Jepsen to say that שפחה is usually used when a slave woman is answerable to a mistress, whereas אמה is used when a slave woman is answerable to the master.<sup>15</sup> This makes this proposal similar to the Fensham-*TDOT* proposal. Prov 30:23 and Isa 24:2 are cited in support.

In a similar vein as Jepsen, Younger and Lipiński both propose that אמה can designate the status of a (free) wife, whereas שפחה does not.<sup>16</sup> This is a corollary of Jepsen's view, which Younger acknowledges, stating more strongly that שפחה is not used to refer to a slave wife.

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<sup>12</sup> *BDB*, 51, 1046.

<sup>13</sup> Neufeld, *Marriage Laws*, 121-124, cited in Fensham, 'The Son,' 314; *TDOT* 15:408; Avigad, *Bullae*, 11-12.

<sup>14</sup> Wolff, *Anthropology*, 199; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (trans. J.J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 238; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1994), 6; Hermann J. Austel, 'Shipḥâ. Maidservant, Maid', in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 946-947; Jack B. Scott, 'אִמָּה ('āmâ)', in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds, R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer, B.K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 49; Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, et al, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (4 vols; Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994+) 1621.

<sup>15</sup> Wenham, *Gen 16-50*, 6; Westermann, *Genesis*, 238.

<sup>16</sup> Younger, 'Comparative,' 127-128; Lipiński, 'Kinship,' 15.

Riesener, however, proposes that אמה emphasises a slave's feminine qualities whereas שפחה is used when the slave is viewed as a possession or labourer.<sup>17</sup> Riesener, usefully and unlike many others before and since, also discusses the use of אמה and שפחה in deference, commenting that אמה 'expresses the speaker's need for protection and help ..., while [שפחה] implies subservience and readiness to serve.' This proposal is accepted by Schultz in *NIDOTTE*.<sup>18</sup> It is similar to proposals above in that שפחה is seen as the term that indicates a lower status than אמה.

These proposed meanings have the common element that the terms reflect status. שפחה designates lower status: a serving woman under the control of her mistress, or a possession. Conversely, אמה designates slave women of all statuses, including slave wives and free wives.

Cohen, followed by Revell, proposes that אמה is characteristically used in legal contexts, whereas שפחה is more common in colloquial contexts.<sup>19</sup> For Cohen, 'colloquial context' means a setting in narrative. That is, שפחה is a 'colloquial' term and אמה is a 'legal' term. This proposal keeps the two terms as synonyms, and accounts for the more frequent use of שפחה over אמה in Genesis. However, it does not take into account the use of אמה in deferential speech. In general, this proposal can only be used tentatively, since שפחה appears in Lev 19:20 and Dt 28:68, clearly in legal settings.

Each of the above proposals fails to account for all uses of אמה and שפחה in the Hebrew Bible. Can a proposal for a distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה be made that covers all uses?

### **The use of שפחה and אמה for female slaves**

The first part of my discussion deals with the use of אמה and שפחה to designate women. The references are:

<sup>17</sup> Riesener, *Der Stamm*, 83; *NIDOTTE* 1:419, 4:212; Edelman, *King Saul*, 214, 220.

<sup>18</sup> Riesener, *Der Stamm*, 83, cited in Younger, 'Comparative,' 127; *NIDOTTE* 1:419; 4:212.

<sup>19</sup> Cohen, 'Studies,' xxxiv; Revell, *Designation*, 38. Younger, 'Comparative,' 126, interprets Cohen to mean there is no distinction between the terms in any way, but Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 6, explains: there is no difference in meaning between the terms, just only a distinction in legal versus colloquial use.

אמה: Gen 20:17; 21:10-13; 30:3; 31:33; Ex 2:5; 20:10, 17; 21:7-11, 20, 26, 27, 32; 23:12; Lev 25:6, 44; Deut 5:21; 12:12, 18; 15:17; 16:11, 14; Judg 9:18; 19:19; 2 Sam 6:20-22; Ezra 2:65; Neh 7:57; Job 19:15; 31:13; Pss 86:16; 116:16; Nah 2:8[7].

שפחה: Gen 12:16; 16:1-8; 20:14; 24:35; 25:12; 29:24, 29; 30:4-18, 43; 32:5[6], 23[22]; 33:1-6; Ex 11:5; Lev 19:20; Dt 28:68; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Sam 17:17; 2 Kgs 5:26; Esth 7:4; Ps 123:2; Prov 30:23; Eccl 2:7; Isa 24:2; Jer 34:9-16.

In this study, I will assume that both אמה and שפחה, when used as descriptors, refer to women who are chattel slaves. There may be occasions when a free woman may be a servant of another, but such are usually designated by נערה (c.f. Ruth 2:8; 1 Sam 25:42). When I discuss אמה and שפחה in relation to עבד, all contexts will indicate that I refer also to male chattel slaves.

### *Synonymous use of the terms*

As already noted, אמה and שפחה are clearly synonyms. When slave women are designated in general without regard to function or status, אמה is used in Ex 21:20-32, Lev 25:6, 44, and Nah 7:8[7]; and שפחה is used in Dt 28:68, 1 Sam 8:16, Jer 34:9-16, and Esth 7:4. In most cases, both terms are used as counterparts to עבד. The references listed above also show that אמה and שפחה are used as synonyms for slave wives. The predominance of this use of the terms in Genesis, which for the exception of Gen 20:17 refer to the slave wives of the patriarchs, is discussed below. It is a factor, even if unacknowledged, in most discussions of possible distinction in meanings between the אמה and שפחה. Both terms are used when slave women are mentioned in property lists, and always as counterparts with עבד. אמה is used in Ezra 2:65 and Neh 7:57 (parallel texts), and שפחה is used in Gen 12:16; 24:35; 32:6[5]; 30:43; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Kgs 5:26; and Eccl 2:7. This predominance of שפחה in property lists is discussed below. Finally, both terms are used when the slave woman is referred to in relation to the master: אמה is used in Job 19:15 and 31:13, and שפחה is used in Gen 29:24, 29.

## ***Patterns***

Despite the synonymy between אמה and שפחה, it is clear that one term predominates over the other in some settings or texts. Consequently, there is a legitimate place for proposing differences in meaning between the two terms. The problem is that no proposal can account for all uses of the terms.

There is clearly a pattern in use in property lists: שפחה is the predominant term, appearing in Gen 12:16; 24:35; 32:6[5]; 30:43; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Kgs 5:26; and Eccl 2:7. אמה appears only twice in this context: in Ex 20:17 (= Dt 5:21) and Ezra 2:65 (=Neh 7:57). This pattern supports the Fensham-TDOT proposal that שפחה indicates lower status than אמה, but only as a general principle rather than as a firm rule for understanding the two terms.

In contrast, אמה appears predominately in legislation, being found in Ex 20:10, 17; 21:7-11, 20, 26, 27, 32; 23:12; Lev 25:6, 44; Dt 5:14, 21; 12:12, 18; 15:17; 16:11, 14. The references cover slave women as the counterpart to slave men: in the household (most references); as possessions (Ex 20:17; [= Dt 5:21]); as workers (Ex 20:10 [= Dt 5:14]; Lev 25:6); when mistreated (Ex 21:20-32); as debt slaves (Dt 15:17; c.f. Ex 21:3); and in the context of marriage (Ex 21:4, 7-11). However, this predominance of אמה in legislation is not complete: שפחה appears in Lev 19:20, a marital context; and in Dt 28:68, a general reference to slavery. In contrast to the legislation context, שפחה appears thrice in straight narrative: 2 Sam 17:17; 2 Kgs 5:26; Esth 7:4. In all cases, status is not indicated, though 2 Sam 17: 17 has a שפחה in the role of a messenger for high status men. Overall, this pattern (אמה in legislation, שפחה in narrative) supports Cohen's proposal that אמה is characteristically used in legal contexts, whereas שפחה is more common in 'colloquial' contexts. But it is probably better to think of שפחה as used more commonly in non-legislative contexts rather than 'colloquial' contexts. However, as for the Fensham-TDOT proposal, Cohen's proposal can only be accepted as a general principle rather than as a firm rule.

It needs to be noted that legislative context accounts for two references of אמה in property lists: Ex 20:17 (= Dt 5:21). It is such intersections between the different contexts of the use of אמה and שפחה that create the difficulty for proposing a distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה that covers all occurrences of the two terms.

Another pattern of use is the predominance of שפחה when designating a slave woman (or servant) in relation to the mistress, found in Gen 16:1-9; 25:12; 30:4-18; Ps 123:2; Prov 30:23; Isa 24:2. In relation to the master, אמה predominates: Gen 21:10-13; Job 19:15; 31:13. Despite the few references for this context, they occur across the Hebrew Bible, so a pattern can be thought of. But, like for the patterns just discussed, there are exceptions, most of which appear in Gen 29-33. In Ex 2:5 an אמה is part of a group of women designated with נערות who the context suggests are personal attendants. In Gen 30:3, Rachel designates Bilhah as אמה, in contrast to Leah's use of שפחה for Zilpah in 30:18. שפחה is also used in Genesis in relation to the master: found in 29:24, 29 (Zilpah and Bilhah are initially owned by Laban) and 32:23[22] (they are Jacob's). In addition both terms are used synonymously for the two slave women when neither master nor mistress is referred to: אמה in 31:33, and שפחה in 33:1-6. In 35:22, Bilhah is also designated by פלגש.<sup>20</sup> The pattern supports Westermann and Wenham's understanding of Jepsen that שפחה is used when a slave woman is answerable to a mistress, but the many exceptions show that the proposal is tentative.

The use of אמה and שפחה for Zilpah and Bilhah Gen 31:33 and 33:1-6 introduces another context for the use of אמה and שפחה: marriage or other conjugal context. Indeed, Zilpah and Bilhah are mostly narrated as being Jacob's slave-wives. Once again, there is an intersection of context for the two terms; here, relationship with master/mistress and marriage/conjugal. In Gen 29-33, אמה and שפחה are interchangeable in this context, shown in Gen 31:33 and 33:1-6, and also in the speeches of 16:2-5 (שפחתי) and 30:3 (אמתי). Sarah's use of שפחתי for Hagar in Gen 16:2-5 could also be contrasted to her use of האמה הזאת in 21:10, but the change in language can be interpreted according to the pattern just discussed above: Sarah emphasises Abraham's legal ownership of Hagar.<sup>21</sup> Outside of Gen 16-33, אמה predominates as the term for slave wives or other conjugal contexts outside of the Genesis narratives, being

<sup>20</sup> Raymond Westbrook, 'The Female Slave', in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSS 262; eds, V.H. Matthews, B.M. Levinson, T. Frymer-Kensky; London: T&T Clark, 1998) 232-233, interprets ('reluctantly') this mix of terms for Zilpah and Bilhah as inconsistency in the text.

<sup>21</sup> God continues with this emphasis in vv.11-12. Westbrook, 'Female Slave,' 228, understands Sarah's change in language to reflect a common element in ancient Near Eastern law: slave-wives were split legal persons. Frequently they were both slave to a mistress and wife to her mistress' husband; the situation presupposed in Gen 16-33 with Hagar, Zilpah and Bilhah. Therefore, removing such a person from the household meant the slave's mistress had to ask her husband to divorce her. Lipiński, 'Kinship,' 14, argues that Gen 21:9-13 presents Hagar as a queen (c.f. Bathsheba's self-designation in 1 Kgs 1:17), in contrast to her being simply a slave in Gen 16:1-9.



found in Gen 20:17; Ex 21:7-11; 23:12; Judg 9:18; 19:19; 2 Sam 6:20-22;<sup>22</sup> Pss 86:16 and 116:16.<sup>23</sup> In Judg 9:18 and 19:19, the two אמה in question are also designated with פילגש ('concubine, secondary wife'; 8:31; 19:1), suggesting in these contexts at least that the slave wife is secondary in status to a free wife.<sup>24</sup> The references indicate a clear pattern of אמה for the marriage/conjugal context, which supports Jepsen and Younger's proposal (along with Lipiński) that אמה is a term that can refer to a wife whereas שפחה does not. However, once again, the proposal can only be thought of as a general principle, not a rule, because of Gen 16-33 and Lev 19:20. Lev 19:20 intersects both legislation and marriage/conjugal contexts as an exception.<sup>25</sup> If Gen 16-33 was removed from discussion (see below), then Jepsen and Younger's proposal would be a near rule.

The discussion above can be presented in the form of a cross-classification table, such as Table 1 below.<sup>26</sup> In this table, decisions had to be made to present the data—hopefully without bias. With regard to 'status', 'high status' covers 'marriage/conjugal' contexts and the 'slave-master relationship', since these are argued to represent a higher standing for a slave woman than the 'slave-mistress relationship' and any occupation that infers a menial role ('low status'). 'Undetermined' covers the use of the terms as general feminine counterparts to עבד without regards to status, and any role for a slave woman for which some associated status cannot be easily determined. 'Narrative' includes Genesis, Joshua-Esther (in English Bibles) and the narrative portions of Exodus and Numbers. Differentiating between 'narrative' and 'legal' is difficult, since it can be argued that 'legal' texts, including Ex 21-24 and Deuteronomy, are 'treatises' (and thus, a form of narrative) rather than formal legislation,

<sup>22</sup> 2 Sam 6:20-22 is riposte between Michal and David, the topic of which is the use of slave women for sexual purposes without regard to marital status.

<sup>23</sup> Ex 23:12, Pss 86:16 and 116:16 contain the phrase, בן־אמתך ('son of your slave woman'), a reference to (male) children born into slavery. Wyatt interprets בן־אמתך in Pss 86:16 and 116:16, a metaphoric use, following Alström and the formula בן אמתך in the Ugaritic *Keret* text (KTU 1.14 ii 3, iii 25; a ritual title of the chief queen of a king that guarantees the/a son of that union to succeed to the throne) to reflect the voice of the king. However, Ex 23:12 indicates that בן־אמתך is simply a term for a man born into slavery, as translated by the NRSV. In Pss 86:16 and 116:16, בן־אמתך is used to evoke God's ownership over the worshipper (see Chapter 3.2).

<sup>24</sup> The low status of אמה is clearly played upon in Judg 9:18. What status the אמה has in Judg 19:19 is difficult to determine, since there is no mention of a free wife in the narrative. Despite the Levite's apparent love for her in v.3, his behaviour towards her in v.25 (allows her to be pack raped) suggests she is a slave, helped by the use of the narrator's אדניה ('her master') for the Levite in v.27.

<sup>25</sup> But see Raymond Westbrook, *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (Cahiers de la Revue Biblique; Paris: Gabalda, 1988) 101-109, who understands שפחה in Lev 19:20 to refer to the wife of a man who is in debt slavery and whose creditor has slept with her. This interpretation has not won support from others.

<sup>26</sup> I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr Stephen Llewelyn for providing me with a model table from which my tables were developed.

such as would be found in present day Western legal codes.<sup>27</sup> ‘Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic’ covers texts that are not narrative or legislation, helped by being poetic in nature. Multiple uses of either term in a single passage for the one context are counted as one use.

**Table 1: אמה and שפחה as designations for slave women**

| Variable 1   | Variable 2              | Variable 3: The Terms |                 |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Status       | Genre                   | אמה                   | שפחה            |
| High         | Property list           |                       |                 |
|              | Legislation             | 2 <sup>28</sup>       | 1 <sup>29</sup> |
|              | Narrative               | 6 <sup>30</sup>       | 4 <sup>31</sup> |
|              | Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic | 4 <sup>32</sup>       | 0               |
| Low          | Property list           | 0                     | 0               |
|              | Legislation             | 0                     | 0               |
|              | Narrative               | 2 <sup>33</sup>       | 4 <sup>34</sup> |
|              | Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic | 0                     | 3 <sup>35</sup> |
| Undetermined | Property list           | 2 <sup>36</sup>       | 7 <sup>37</sup> |
|              | Legislation             | 13 <sup>38</sup>      | 1 <sup>39</sup> |
|              | Narrative               | 0                     | 3 <sup>40</sup> |
|              | Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic | 0                     | 0               |

Some of the patterns discussed above are clearly seen, especially the predominance of אמה in the legislation context and שפחה in property lists. In both contexts, the predominant use of

<sup>27</sup> Wells, Bruce, ‘Introduction: The Idea of a Shared Tradition’, in *The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 1: The Shared Tradition* (eds, B. Wells; F.R. Magdalene; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009) xiii-xv. For Westbrook’s arguments, see Raymond Westbrook, ‘Biblical and Cuneiform Law Codes’, *Revue Biblique* 92 (1985) 247-265; idem, ‘Cuneiform Law Codes and the Origins of Legislation’, *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 79 (1989) 201-222; and idem, ‘Codification and Canonization’, in *La Codification des lois dans l’antiquité: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 27-29 Novembre 1997* (ed., E. Lévy; Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et al Grèce antiques 16; Paris: De Boccard, 2000) 33-47. All are reprinted in B. Wells, F.R. Magdalene (eds), *The Writings of Raymond Westbrook, Volume 1: The Shared Tradition*.

<sup>28</sup> Ex 21:7-11 (marriage context); and Ex 23:12 (בן-אמתך)

<sup>29</sup> Lev 19:20 (marriage context)

<sup>30</sup> Gen 21:10-13 (relationship to master context); 20:17; 31:33; Judg 9:18; 19:19; 2 Sam 6:20-22 (all marriage/conjugal contexts)

<sup>31</sup> Gen 29:24, 29 and 32:23[22] (relationship to master context); 33:1-6 (marriage context);

<sup>32</sup> Job 19:15 and 31:13 (relationship to master context); Pss 86:16 and 116:16 (בן-אמתך)

<sup>33</sup> Gen 30:3 (Rachel’s designation of Bilhah); Ex 2:5

<sup>34</sup> Gen 16:1-9 (includes Sarah and Abraham’s designation of Hagar); 25:12; 30:4-18 (includes Leah’s designation of Zilpah, v.18); Ex 11:5 (a merism with *Pharaoh*, indicating the lowest status, to cover all statuses in Egyptian society. Note, however, the שפחה in Ex 11:5 has a child, so even in this context, שפחה can refer to a slave woman in a conjugal setting, though the focus is on her low status.

<sup>35</sup> Ps 123:2; Prov 30:23; Isa 24:2

<sup>36</sup> Ex 20:17 (= Dt 5:21); Ezra 2:65 (=Neh 7:57)

<sup>37</sup> Gen 12:16; 24:35; 32:6[5]; 30:43; 1 Sam 8:16; 2 Kgs 5:26; Eccl 2:7

<sup>38</sup> Ex 20:10 (= Dt 5:14); 21:20, 26, 27, 32; 23:12; Lev 25:6, 44; Dt 12:12, 18; 15:17; 16:11, 14

<sup>39</sup> Dt 28:68

<sup>40</sup> 2 Sam 17:17; 2 Kgs 5:26; Esth 7:4

either term is for the feminine counterpart to עבד without thought of status or role. Since most property lists are set in narrative (Ex 20:17 [= Dt 5:221] is the exception being in a legislation context), adding the three references for שפחה as undetermined status gives strong support to Cohen's proposal that אמה is used in 'legal' texts and שפחה in 'colloquial' contexts. However, as discussed above, there are enough exceptions to show that Cohen's proposal can only be a general principle, not a cover-all rule.

More prominent is the clear distinction without exception between the use of אמה in 'high status' contexts (slave-master and marriage/conjugal contexts) and שפחה in 'low status' contexts (slave-mistress relationship) in Psalms, other Wisdom writings and Prophetic texts. However, the near equal use both terms for both 'high' and 'low' status in narrative balances this out. Thus the Jepsen-Westermann-Wenham proposal, that שפחה is usually used when a slave woman is answerable to a mistress whereas אמה is used when a slave woman is answerable to the master, can only be applied as a rule to poetic type texts.

As indicated above, Gen 16-33 is a factor in the difficulty of determining possible distinctions in meaning between אמה and שפחה. As shown, אמה frequently is used as a synonym. Tables 2 and 3 show what happens to the genre of 'narrative' when Gen 16-33 is factored out of discussion and when Gen 16-33 alone is looked at.

**Table 2: אמה and שפחה as designations for slave women: Genesis 16-33 only**

| Variable 1 | Variable 2 | Variable 3: The Terms |      |
|------------|------------|-----------------------|------|
| Status     | Genre      | אמה                   | שפחה |
| High       | Narrative  | 3                     | 4    |
| Low        | Narrative  | 1                     | 3    |

**Table 3: אמה and שפחה as designations for slave women: Genesis 16-33 excluded**

| Variable 1   | Variable 2 | Variable 3: The Terms |      |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------|------|
| Status       | Genre      | אמה                   | שפחה |
| High         | Narrative  | 3                     | 0    |
| Low          | Narrative  | 1                     | 1    |
| Undetermined | Narrative  | 0                     | 3    |

Removing Gen 16-33 gives added support to all proposals that אמה can carry a higher status than שפחה, since outside of this narrative, שפחה is not used in the slave-master relationship and

marriage contexts. Genesis 16-33 also shows a preference for using שפחה in the 'low status' (slave-mistress relationship) context. If all appearances of אמה and שפחה for slave women in Gen 16-33 were listed, the number of times שפחה appears far exceeds אמה, making Gen 16-33 in line with other biblical narrative texts.

### **The use of שפחה and אמה in deference**

The other major context of use of אמה and שפחה is in deferential speech and in prayer. It has been noted above that previous scholarship, with the exception of Riesener, has not, for example, distinguished between the use of אמה and שפחה in deference and when designating slave women. An analysis of the two terms when used in deference will show when both are used synonymously and when one term is preferred over the other. The observations can then be correlated with what has been observed for their use when designating slave women.

The references in which אמה and שפחה are used in deference are:

אמה: Ruth 3:9; 1 Sam 1:11, 16; 25:24, 25, 28, 31; 2 Sam 14:15b-16; 20:17; 1 Kgs 3:20  
שפחה: Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam 1:18; 25:27; 2 Sam 14:4-7, 12, 15a, 17, 19; 2 Kgs 4:16  
אמה and שפחה together: 1 Sam 25:41

2 immediate observations can be made. One is that both terms can appear in a single speech or dialogue (1 Sam 1:12-18; 25:24-31 and 2 Sam 14:4-19). A second is that they all appear in narrative texts. The latter is not surprising, since it is in narrative that speech or other communication is narrated.

### ***Synonymous use of the terms***

The dialogues/speaking in 1 Sam 1:12-18, 25:24-31, and 2 Sam 14:4-19 indicate that אמה and שפחה are synonyms. There is no pattern in use of the terms. In Abigail's speech to David, אמה is preferred over שפחה (1 Sam 25:24, 25, 28, 31 for אמה; v.27 for שפחה). In the Tekoite woman's dialogue with David, שפחה is preferred over אמה (2 Sam 14:4-7, 12, 15a, 17, 19 for שפחה; vv.15b, 16 for אמה). In the short dialogue between Hannah and Eli in 1 Sam 1:12-18, Hannah uses each term once.

In these dialogues/speeches, both terms are used in connection with presenting requests. This is also the case with other female characters who also ask for something (אמה: Ruth 3:9; 1 Sam 1:11 [prayer]; 1 Kgs 3:20; שפחה: 1 Sam 28:21-22). Specifically, both terms are used equally in requests for a hearing or to speak further (אמה: 1 Sam 25:24; 2 Sam 20:17; שפחה: 1 Sam 28:21-22; 2 Sam 14:12). Both terms appear in expressions of gratitude (אמה: 1 Sam 25:41; שפחה: Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam 1:18), when self-defence is given (אמה: 1 Sam 1:16; 25:25 שפחה: 2 Sam 14:19), and when critique is made of the (socially superior) hearer (אמה: 2 Sam 20:17; שפחה: 2 Sam 14:15a, 17; 2 Kgs 4:16). In all cases, no status is implied in the use of the terms.

### ***Patterns***

There is very little in the way of patterns of preference of one term over the other. One possible pattern is the sole use of אמה in the context of requests for marriage (Ruth 3:9; 1 Sam 25:31), which reflects a ‘high status’ use of אמה, and argued to be so by Jepsen, Younger and Lipiński. Since it only occurs twice, and in Abigail’s speaking אמה is the predominant term, this ‘pattern’ can only remain as a tentative observation. However, it matches with the preferred use of אמה in narrative for slave-wives or slave women in conjugal contexts. Conversely, Abigail’s metaphoric use of שפחה in 1 Sam 25:41 for self-abasement can be understood as a ‘low status’ use of שפחה.

A second possible pattern is that שפחה is used in the context of critiquing the socially superior hearer. The use of אמה in 2 Sam 20:17 may work against this, but אמה is located in the woman’s request to be heard rather than the critique proper. 1 Sam 1:16, אמה used in self-defence, may also work against this pattern, as Hannah’s self-deference to Eli is also a critique of his view of her.

It would be nice to say that Hannah’s deferential use of אמה when praying in 1 Sam 1:11 indicates a pattern that when women pray to God, they use אמה. But a once only reference cannot be used to establish a pattern. The use of בן־אמתך in Pss 86:16 and 116:16 cannot be used as support, since as argued above, they reflect the preference for the use of אמה in

marriage/conjugal contexts. The Hebrew Bible only narrates only a few women praying, and of those, only Hannah's prayer is reported.

The discussion can be presented as in Table 4 below:

**Table 4: אמה and שפחה in deference**

| Variable 1   | Variable 2 | Variable 3: The Terms |                 |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Status       | Genre      | אמה                   | שפחה            |
| High         | Speech     | 2 <sup>41</sup>       | 0               |
| Low          | Speech     | 0                     | 1 <sup>42</sup> |
| Undetermined | Speech     | 7 <sup>43</sup>       | 5 <sup>44</sup> |

Similarly with Tables 1-3, multiple uses of either term in a single speech or dialogue are counted as one use. As it is, the predominance of אמה in 1 Sam 25 and שפחה in 2 Sam 14 balance each other out. If both texts were removed from discussion, the use both terms in undetermined status in deference would remain even (אמה: 1 Sam 1:11, 16; 2 Sam 20:17; 1 Kgs 3:20; שפחה: Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam 1:18; 2 Kgs 4:16), שפחה would be removed as a 'low status' use, and Ruth 3:9 remains the only 'high status' use of אמה. Table 4 also shows that Riesener's proposal, that אמה 'expresses the speaker's need for protection and help ...', while [שפחה] implies subservience and readiness to serve', cannot be sustained. Her proposal can only be argued from 1 Sam 25:41, in which אמה is the term of deference and שפחה is used as a metaphor for marriage. What associations of ideas or connotations שפחה calls up goes beyond the deferential use of the term.

## Summary

Putting everything together, Table 5 results:

<sup>41</sup> Ruth 3:9; 2 Sam 25:31

<sup>42</sup> 1 Sam 25:41

<sup>43</sup> 1 Sam 1:11, 16; 25:24-28, 41; 2 Sam 14:15b-16; 20:17; 1 Kgs 3:20

<sup>44</sup> Ruth 2:13; 1 Sam 1:18; 25:27; 2 Sam 14:4-19; 2 Kgs 4:16

**Table 5 - שפחה and אמה in all contexts**

| Variable 1   | Variable 2              | Variable 3: The Terms |      |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| Status       | Genre                   | אמה                   | שפחה |
| High         | Property list           | 0                     | 0    |
|              | Legislation             | 2                     | 1    |
|              | Narrative               | 6                     | 4    |
|              | Speech                  | 2                     | 0    |
|              | Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic | 4                     | 0    |
| Low          | Property list           | 0                     | 0    |
|              | Legislation             | 0                     | 0    |
|              | Narrative               | 2                     | 4    |
|              | Speech                  | 0                     | 1    |
|              | Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic | 0                     | 3    |
| Undetermined | Property list           | 2                     | 7    |
|              | Legislation             | 13                    | 1    |
|              | Narrative               | 0                     | 3    |
|              | Speech                  | 7                     | 5    |
|              | Psalms/Wisdom/Prophetic | 0                     | 0    |

Two patterns are clear. The first is אמה is the favoured term in ‘high status’ contexts; that is, for the slave-master relationship, and marriage/conjugal contexts. However, the presence of שפחה in this context shows that it is not a firm biblical pattern, though if Gen 16-33 were removed from discussion, only Lev 19:20 would remain as a ‘high status’ use for שפחה. The second pattern is the corollary: שפחה is the favoured term in ‘low status contexts; that is, for the slave-mistress relationship, and any roles that can be described as ‘menial’. However, the presence of אמה in this context shows that it is not a firm biblical pattern. Against these two patterns is the variability of the ‘undetermined status’ use of אמה and שפחה. Property lists favour שפחה, legislation texts favour אמה, and neither is favoured in deferential speech. Genre issues also affects the two clear patterns. If all uses of שפחה in Gen 16:1-9 and 30:4-18 were counted, the ‘low status’ pattern of שפחה would be strengthened, but if Gen 16-33 were removed from discussion, the pattern would still remain, though more subdued.

The result is that no one proposal for distinctions in meaning between אמה and שפחה can be maintained across the Hebrew Bible. However, it is clear that when status can be determined for individual uses of אמה and שפחה, אמה is preferred across the Hebrew Bible for ‘higher status’ contexts, and שפחה as the lower status term. Thus, the proposals of *BDB*, Neufeld, Fensham and *TDOT* are affirmed as broad principles, but can only remain as a *biblical preference*, not coverall-rules of interpretation. Similarly, אמה is favoured as the term for

marriage/conjugal contexts, thus affirming Jepsen, Younger and Lipiński's proposals, but its predominance in legislation texts and synonymy with שפחה in deference and in Gen 16-33 shows that marriage is not the sole distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה. Likewise, the clear favouring of אמה in legislation contexts affirms Cohen's proposal that אמה is the legal term for a slave woman, but there is more to the terms than legal settings.

### How did שפחה come about?

The predominance of אמה in legislation and 'high status' contexts and שפחה in 'low status' contexts and in property lists begs the question as to why each term is preferred in these contexts, and whether such use can be related to the etymology of each term. אמה has clear cognates in both Northwest Semitic languages ('*mt*) and Akkadian (*amtu*), all taking the meaning 'female slave'.<sup>45</sup> However, שפחה is not attested outside of the Hebrew Bible, despite some earlier scholarship attempting to relate שפחה to, for example, Old Arabic *šph* ('pour water on'), thus arguing that שפחה is a derivative: pouring water denotes a woman who does so; and thus by metonymy, a servant/slave.<sup>46</sup> The lexeme *šph* occurs in Ugaritic and Punic, but takes the meaning, 'clan, family', to which the Hebrew lexeme משפחה is thought to be a cognate.<sup>47</sup> Despite its similarity to these other terms, שפחה is understood not to be related to these terms, except by Lipiński.<sup>48</sup> Thus שפחה appears to be a uniquely Hebrew term for 'slave woman'.

It is tempting to view the favouring of שפחה in 'low status' contexts and in property lists and the favouring of אמה in legislation and 'high status' contexts on the basis of cognates or lack of. Since אמה is a cognate of '*mt* and *amtu*, it might be that the ancient Israelites, as they developed their language, kept אמה as the technical lexeme for a slave woman, and somehow developed שפחה as a unique Hebrew non-technical lexeme. This suggestion is in keeping with Cohen's proposal. The use of אמה in the wife/conjugal setting at first sight does not fit this schema, but can be explained by the frequent sexual exploitation of slave women in the

<sup>45</sup> J. Hoftijzer, K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1995) 70, cite a wide range of epigraphic material.

<sup>46</sup> See comments in *HALOT*, 1621; *NIDOTTE*, 211; *TDOT*, 15:406. The idea of 'pouring water' as a metonymy for personal service gets support from 2 Kgs 3:11, where Elisha is described as having *poured water on the hands of Elijah*.

<sup>47</sup> *DNWSI*, 1181; c.f. *TDOT*, 15:406.

<sup>48</sup> Lipiński, 'Kinship,' 15-16. C.f. for אמה: it also means 'cubit', a meaning attested in Semitic cognates, yet is obviously unrelated to 'slave'!



ancient Near East;<sup>49</sup> אמה in the Silwen Royal Steward inscription and two Ammonite women seals;<sup>50</sup> and 'mt in a Phoenician inscription on a votive ivory box, and for Queen Gaḥimat in an South Arabic text.<sup>51</sup> All these contexts suggest the meaning 'wife'. This may have created a situation that when ancient Israelites referred to slave women in the context of marriage or other conjugal arrangements, אמה automatically came to mind rather than שפחה. The same can be argued for the use of אמה in relation to the slave-master relationship context. It is impossible to tell if שפחה may have originally been a slang or derogative term, but its predominance in the slave-mistress relationship and 'menial' contexts suggests the possibility. However, by the time the Hebrew texts were being compiled אמה and שפחה had clearly become synonyms. This is most clearly indicated by the use of אמה and שפחה as deference in speech without strong patterns of the use of either term for particular aspects of speaking, and the synonymy of אמה and שפחה in a range of settings in Gen 16-33.

It is also of interest that אמה and שפחה do not have verb equivalents. This seems also to be the case with the Northwest Semitic 'mt and the Akkadian *amtu*. Biblical Hebrew, apparently also in line with other Northwest Semitic languages, does not have a term for 'slave woman' that is cognate with the lexeme עבד. Instead, the feminine substantive עבדה means 'work'. Either Hebrew has developed עבדה because of the retention of 'mt (being changed into אמה), or has just simply carried over the Semitic tradition of not using lexemes for 'work/serve' for slave women.

Dictionaries and lexica do not speculate on the etymology of אמה and its Semitic cognates. Given the apparent high occurrence of slave women in marriage/conjugal situations, it might be that אמה and its cognates are derived from אַם/*umm*/'*imm*/'*umm*, 'mother'. That is, אמה and its cognates may have originally denoted a slave mother, and thus secondary wife. This also

<sup>49</sup> See I. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949) 6-14, 50-55; and D.C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East 3100-332 B.C.E.* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1997) 71. The Elephantine papyri, Brooklyn 5, 8 (430-400 BCE) witness to masters fathering children through slave women.

<sup>50</sup> The texts are: את [קברת ...] יהו אשר על הבית אין פה כסף וזהב [כי] אם [עצמתו] ועצמת אמתה אתה אדור האדם אשר יפתח את זאח (This is [the sepulchre of ...]yahu who is over the house. There is no silver and no gold here but [his bones] and the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who will open this!); אליה אמת הנבאל (Aliah maidservant of Hananel); and אנמית אמת דבלס (nmwt maidservant of dblbs). See John R. Abercrombie, 'A Short Note on a Siloam Tomb Inscription', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 254 (1984) 61-62; N. Avigad, 'The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village', *Israel Exploration Journal* 3 (1953) 137-152. However, Avigad dithers on whether אמה in the Ammonite seal inscriptions means '(female) official'; see Avigad, *Bullae*, 12; idem, 'A Seal of a Slave-wife (amah)', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (1946) 125-132.

<sup>51</sup> Lipiński, 'Kinship,' 13-14.

suits the בן־אמת formula of Ex 23:12; Ps 86:16 and 116:16. Similarly, despite scholarship refusing to link שפחה with משפחה and the Semitic *šph* ('clan, family'), שפחה may be related to משפחה; that is, שפחה originally denoted a female family servant/slave. Using this similarity of שפחה with משפחה, Lipiński goes as far to argue that שפחה originally referred to 'a house-born girl who was not a legal daughter of the *paterfamilias*'.<sup>52</sup> This understanding suits the occurrences of the term in the context of personal service (e.g. Gen 16:1; 29:24, 29; Ps 123:2 [implied]), which matches Jepsen's understanding of שפחה. The loosening up of שפחה from this proposed original designation is assisted with the use of נערה to denote women in personal service situations, found in Gen 24:61; Ex 2:5; 1 Sam 25:42; Esth 4:4, 16; Prov 9:3; 27:27 and 31:15. If anything, נערה is preferred over שפחה to designate women who unambiguously give personal service to another.

## Conclusions

אמה and שפחה are synonyms in the Hebrew Bible. Both are used to designate slave women in general, in specified roles, in property lists, in relationship with their master or mistress, and in marriage or other conjugal relationship. The same is the case for when אמה and שפחה are used in deferential speech by women in narrative texts. However, some patterns are observable. אמה is predominant term in legislation, slave-master relationship, and marriage/conjugal contexts. שפחה is the predominant term in property lists, and in 'menial' status and slave-mistress relationship contexts. These are clear patterns, but each predominant term is not used solely in each context. Hence no distinction in meaning can be inferred. The use of אמה and שפחה in deference also emphasises their synonymy. Characters prefer either one or the other, yet use both in longer speeches or dialogues. However, two possible patterns of use can be discerned. אמה appears to be preferred in requests for marriage, which matches the pattern of its predominance in marriage/conjugal contexts, and שפחה seems preferred in critique of a hearer. But the paucity of references for each pattern makes them tentative. It would appear previous scholarship has focused on one or another of the observable patterns and sought to apply it as an interpretative principle for all uses of אמה and שפחה. Instead of trying to determine distinctions in meaning between the two terms on the basis of perceived patterns, they should rather be viewed as preferences.

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<sup>52</sup> Lipiński, 'Kinship,' 15.

My proposal for the origins of both אמה and שפחה, that אמה is related to אם, and שפחה is related to משפחה and/or the Semitic cognate *špḥ* needs further study into the Semitic cognates. It is acknowledged that if שפחה was to appear in epigraphic remains, its context of use in such remains will obviously have a bearing on the discussion of the two terms, just as the presence of אמה in the Ammonite seals and in the Royal Steward tomb inscription have forced scholars to consider more seriously אמה to have the meaning, 'wife/secondary wife'.

## ABSTRACT

Study of the two female slave terms, אמה and שפחה (*'āmâ* and *šipḥâ*) that takes into account text genre and context of use shows that, in contrast to current scholarship, that there is no inherent distinction in meaning between אמה and שפחה (*'āmâ* and *šipḥâ*). The two terms are used interchangeably for slave wives in Genesis, in legislation contexts for a slave woman of any standing, and in deferential language by women in narrative. However, there are some patterns of use of the two terms. אמה (*'āmâ*) is predominant in legislation, the slave-master relationship and slave-marriage or other conjugal contexts. שפחה (*šipḥâ*) is predominant in property lists, the slave-mistress relationship context, and in menial contexts. No one pattern has a sole use of the terms. It is argued that these and other patterns simply reflect the preference of authors/compiler of the relevant texts. A proposal is also made concerning the origins of the two terms: that both are related to other familial terms.

## KEY WORDS

Slave, slave women, maidservant, deference, Old Testament, philology

## **1.2. SELF-ABASEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THANKS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

### **Introduction**

There are a number of statements in narratives in which characters abase themselves when somebody has treated them favourably. Two examples are:

Mephibosheth to David in 2 Sam 9:8: *He did obeisance and said, "What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?"* (NRSV)

Mephibosheth responds to being given a 'royal pension' (the right to eat at the court).

Abigail to David's men in 1 Sam 25:41: *She rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said, "Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."*

Abigail responds to David's proposal to marry her after her husband Nabal has died.

What is the intent behind such statements? Obviously the character belittles him/herself to the hearer but why do it? I wish to answer these questions by applying a combination of politeness theory and metaphor theory to argue that ancient Israelites tended to abase themselves when they gave thanks for a favour received or request granted. By doing this, they avoided obligation to whoever gave the request/favour.

### **Interpreting self-abasement**

Mephibosheth's use of self abasement is easy to interpret. 'Dead dog' refers to his status as a descendent of Saul's family. He lives in the fear of being seen as a threat to David.<sup>1</sup> This is expressed in 2 Sam 19:28, when he has to counter his servant Ziba's claim in 2 Sam 16:3 that

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<sup>1</sup> It is common for scholarship to understand David's kindness as being two-edged: he favours Mephibosheth because of his covenant with Jonathan, Mephibosheth's father (1 Sam 20), but at the same time can keep a watch on this potentially significant figure in the Saulide house. See, e.g. Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1999) 243; John Mauchline, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971) 241; and Hans W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM, 1964) 299-301. James W. Flanagan, 'Court History or Succession Document? A Study of 2 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kgs 1-2', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972) 180-181, understands David's actions to forestall rebellions in the name of Saul, but failed; whereas Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester: IVP, 1988) 227-228 understands David's actions to be pure magnanimity, though she recognises the potential of a threat to David from Mephibosheth's son, Micah.

he thought he might become king during Absalom's rebellion. This fear is justified: later in the narrative David has descendants of Saul killed (2 Sam 21:1-14).

Abigail's response to David's marriage proposal, however, continues to be debated as to what she intends by her language. Most scholarship recognises it is metaphorical, helped by the context—she is the wife (now widow) of a wealthy man and goes to David with five maids/slave women attending her (v.42). But Edelman wishes to keep the slave terms literal to argue that Abigail wanted to become a secondary wife to David, a desire present in her interaction with David from the beginning. This is in contrast to Biddle and Bodner who argue that Abigail's retinue of maids portrays her as a queen. Klein understands Abigail's language to be simply that of hospitality.<sup>2</sup>

Self-abasement is found throughout the Old Testament and in a variety of contexts. A speaker can use it to reject significance (Ex 3:11; 1 Sam 18:18, 23; Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6), or to claim significance (1 Sam 17:43; 2 Sam 3:8).<sup>3</sup> It can express surprise (1 Sam 9:21; 2 Kgs 8:13),<sup>4</sup> and it can deny being a threat (1 Sam 24:14 [MT 24:15]). Many uses of self-abasement take the form of a question, *What is ...* or *Who am I*, followed by an apodosis, *that ...*. This form is conventional in the ancient Near East for self-abasement, as well as in invective against others.<sup>5</sup> Self-abasement therefore is an aspect of biblical culture (as well as in the wider ancient Near East), but the purpose of my paper is to focus on its use in the context of thanks, as this is the most frequent context of its use in the Old Testament.

<sup>2</sup> Diana V. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOTSS 121; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991) 214; Mark E. Biddle, 'Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002) 622-623; Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (HBM 19; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008) 271; Ralph Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10; Milton Keynes: Word, 1986) 252.

<sup>3</sup> Both Goliath and Abner respond rhetorically to insults, whether expressed (by Ish-bosheth to Abner) or implied (David intends to fight Goliath only lightly armed. See Jeremy M. Hutton, "'Abdi-Aširta, the Slave, the Dog": Self-Abasement and Invective in the Amarna letters, the Lachish Letters, and 2 Sam 3:8', *ZA* 15/16 (2002/2003) 4, 12-14.

<sup>4</sup> In both verses, the kingship is promised to the speaker.

<sup>5</sup> See George W. Coats, 'Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1972) 14-26, and Edward J. Bridge, 'Politeness in the Lachish Letters', *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (2011) [forthcoming]. For some biblical examples of abasement in invective, see Deut 23:18; 1 Sam 17:43; 2 Sam 16:9; Pss 22:17[16], 21[20]; Is 56:10-11, all using the term, *dog* (כֶּלֶב; *klb*).

## Methodology

As shown for 1 Sam 25:41, self-abasement can be difficult to interpret. Some theoretical approach is therefore needed to assist determining what is intended by it. For my analysis, I have found aspects of politeness theory and metaphor theory to be helpful.

Politeness theory,<sup>6</sup> argues that all people have ‘face’, that is a sense of honour or respect from others, and adjust their language to respect the ‘face’ of those they communicate with. Space does not permit a detailed review of the theory,<sup>7</sup> but Brown and Levinson argue that politeness is affected by the relationship the interactants are in, and postulates a number of linguistic strategies of politeness that is argued all peoples use when engaged in polite speaking. However, the particular aspect of the theory that I wish to use is the politeness involved in giving thanks. Brown and Levinson note that when people give thanks, they will either express it in self-abasement (that is, reduce face so the hearer does not lose face), or express obligation to the other.<sup>8</sup> This idea matches with cultural-anthropological study on gift giving; namely, in most cultures, the receiver of a gift is obligated to the gift giver.<sup>9</sup> My argument is that people in the Old Testament mostly use the former strategy to other people, but mostly use the latter when they thank God. Self-abasement is also an extreme form of deference, a linguistic strategy in which the speaker humbles and/or abases himself and portrays the hearer as being of a higher status than him.<sup>10</sup>

The particular form of metaphor theory I am using is Ritchie’s ‘contextual theory of metaphor’ (2006).<sup>11</sup> Two aspects this theory I am using are the idea of ‘lexicalised metaphor’

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<sup>6</sup> Penelope Brown, Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (SIS 4; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

<sup>7</sup> See my article, ‘Polite Israel and Impolite Edom’, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35 (2010) [forthcoming].

<sup>8</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> The foundational work is Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (trans. W.D. Halls; New York, 1990); used in Mark W. Hamilton, ‘At Whose Table? Stories of Elites and Social Climbers in 1-2 Samuel’, *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009) 519; and Michelle Stephen, ‘Reparation and the gift’, *Ethos* 28 (2000) 119-121. Brown and Levinson understand gift giving to be a politeness strategy in its own right, but Mauss’ study suggest this is incorrect.

<sup>10</sup> Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 178.

<sup>11</sup> L. David Ritchie, *Context and Connection in Metaphor* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). This theory of metaphor stands in the tradition of Max Black’s interactive theory (Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962]), but is also informed by the well-known cognitive theory of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors we Live by* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), Paul Ricoeur’s discourse approach to metaphor, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans., Robert Czerny; Buffalo: University of

and the idea that metaphors can present a ‘counterfactual scenario’ to a topic (e.g. as in jokes, irony and sarcasm). ‘Lexicalised metaphor’ occurs when a metaphorical meaning of a term becomes dictionary like. But Ritchie argues that it never loses the latent metaphoricity that resulted in that meaning.<sup>12</sup> A ‘counterfactual scenario’ occurs when the connotation or association evoked by the metaphor counters the topic, or is used contrary to expectations. This idea relates directly to the presence of self-abasement in some biblical texts, particularly that used by high status people. For example, in Abigail’s self-abasement to David mentioned above, she says she is a *maidservant* (שפחה; *špḥh*) who washes the feet of David’s men’. But in vv.3-4 she is described as wealthy, and in v.42 she has five *maids* (נערות; *n’rwt*) attending her! *Maidservant* (שפחה; *špḥh*) is a metaphor for being David’s new wife.

### Self-abasement in the context of thanks – to humans

In Abigail’s statement, “*Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord*” (NRSV), ‘slave’ (שפחה; *špḥh*) carries the metaphoric self-abasement, especially with the addition of *to wash the feet of* [David’s] *servants* (עבדים; *bdym*).<sup>13</sup> As just noted, ‘slave’ is counterfactual to Abigail’s social status—wealthy with five female attendants. Given that Abigail has asked to be ‘remembered’ by David in v.31, which can be understood as an indirect request that David marry her, her self-abasement should be interpreted as thanks. By using self-abasement, Abigail accepts a reduction in ‘face’ which has the effect of highlighting David’s proposal as a generous favour. From this, one can argue that she sees marriage to David as preferable to her (now former) marriage to Nabal, and thanks David profusely for it. Abigail expresses no obligation on her part.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, her interaction with David cannot be interpreted as her being obligated to him, such as in a treaty between David’s household and hers, or as an eponymous story of the Jesse and Calebite clans making a treaty between them.<sup>15</sup>

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Toronto Press, 2000), and others since. Ritchie in particular studies the context of both metaphor production and reception, and develops a theory based on human memory to quantify Black’s idea of ‘commonplace associations’.

<sup>12</sup> Here, Ritchie argues against the well-known idea of ‘dead metaphor’, popularised by Lakoff and Johnson.

<sup>13</sup> *Your servant* (אמתך; *mtk* [[אמה; *mh*]]) and *my lord* (אדני; *adny* [[אדון; *adwn*]]) is conventional biblical deferential language.

<sup>14</sup> Obviously a wife is obligated to her husband, but that is not the point of the narrative.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Lozovsky, *Saul, Doeg, Nabal and “the Son of Jesse”: Readings in 1 Samuel 16-25* (LHB/OTS 497; New York, London: T&T Clark, 2009) 176-177; Jon D. Levenson, Baruch Halpern, ‘The Political Import of David’s Marriages’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980) 509-523; Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of*

In Gen 47:9, Jacob makes the statement to Pharaoh, ... *few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn*” (NRSV). ‘Few’ (מָעוֹט; *m’ot*) is the metaphoric term of self-abasement. The statement is clearly counterfactual to Jacob’s age, 130 years, apparently much longer than the ideal lifespan for Egyptians, and probably the reason why Jacob had the privilege to bless Pharaoh.<sup>16</sup> ‘Hard’ (רָע; *r’*; ‘evil’, ‘bad’) is not counterfactual to the events of Jacob’s life as narrated in Genesis, but is counterfactual to the ideal of a long *happy* life. Jacob’s statement can be interpreted as thanks for the privilege of sojourning in Egypt with his self-abasement as a claim he is not a vassal to Egypt.

It has already been noted that ‘dead dog’ in Mephibosheth’s statement to David, *What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I?*’ (2 Sam 9:8; NRSV) refers to his status as a descendant of Saul. That is, ‘dead dog’ (כָּלֵב מֵת; *klb mt*)<sup>17</sup> is the metaphoric term of self-abasement. The use of *dog* (כָּלֵב; *klb*) as a metaphor for self-abasement and invective has a long history in the ancient Near East,<sup>18</sup> so Mephibosheth’s use can be understood as drawing upon stock language. Mephibosheth uses the term to convey unworthiness (that is, evoking an association that dogs are unclean and contemptible, used in the same way in the Amarna letters and the Lachish letters<sup>19</sup>); that is, he reduces his ‘face’ to highlight David’s generosity in offering him a royal pension, and thus increases David’s ‘face’. However, his situation is not counterfactual. He lives under the threat of a possible purge of the previous royal family.<sup>20</sup>

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*Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim 1985) 127-128.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 370-371; Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 587; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005) 846; implied in Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* (trans. J.J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 170. These commentators argue that Egyptians viewed 110 years as the ideal lifespan. For other comments, see Chapter 7.3, fn.91.

<sup>17</sup> The exact form is כָּלֵב מֵת, since *dead dog* is the object of the verb, *you looked upon*.

<sup>18</sup> D.W. Thomas, ‘Kelebh “Dog”: Its Origin and Some Usages of it in the Old Testament’, *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960) 410-427; Hutton, “‘Abdi-Aširta,’” 2-18. See also Coats, ‘Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas,’ 14-26. For Old Testament texts in which *dog* is used, see fn.5 above.

<sup>19</sup> See also Thomas, ‘Kelebh,’ 410-427; Hutton, “‘Abdi-Aširta,’” 2-18; c.f. Chapter 5.3. For a study that focuses on positive metaphorical uses, see Galán, José, ‘What is He, the Dog’, *Ugarit-Forschungen* 25 (1993) 173-180.

<sup>20</sup> A purge is recorded in 2 Sam 21:1-14, but the narrator is careful to indicate it is not because of a change of dynasty *per se*. It is frequently argued that 2 Sam 21 occurred early in David’s reign, which can explain both the *anyone left of the house of Saul* in 9:1 and Shimei’s accusation in 16:7 that David is *a man of blood*, having shed the blood of the house of Saul. See, e.g. Hertzberg, *Samuel*, 299. Alter, *David Story*, 240, remains ambivalent on the question; Baldwin, *Samuel*, 282-283, recognises the incident in 2 Sam 21 occurred sometime during David’s reign but does not say when; but Mauchline, *Samuel*, argues it occurred after 9:1 and 16:7.



No obligation is expressed, which becomes a factor in the wider narrative: his servant/slave Ziba accuses him of treason in 2 Sam 16 during Absalom’s rebellion, which requires him to defend his loyalty to David in 19:26-29.

Ruth’s statement to Boaz, “*May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants*” (Ruth 2:13; NRSV) is similar to Mephibosheth’s statement to David. Here, ‘I am not one of your servants’ is the statement of self abasement. It refers to her status as a foreigner, stated in a previous turn in the dialogue (Ruth 2:10). Like for Mephibosheth, there is no counterfactual scenario. Ruth, by drawing attention to her foreign origins, implies she has no right to be specially treated,<sup>21</sup> which is what Boaz has been doing. By doing this, she reduces her standing before Boaz. Boaz’s generosity is thus highlighted: he has favoured a person who has no legal status in the community. No obligation is expressed. Instead, as the story goes on to show, Ruth attempts to *obligate* Boaz in her request that he act as *goel* (kinsman redeemer) (Ruth 3:9), which elicits his response that she is kind or loyal to him (vv.10-11)!

A hidden example of self-abasement occurs in 2 Sam 14:22. Here, *Joab prostrated himself with his face to the ground and did obeisance, and blessed the king, and Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favour in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king granted the request of his servant”* (NRSV). At first sight there is neither a counterfactual scenario nor self-abasement on the part of Joab. Both obeisance and the use of *your servant* (עַבְדְּךָ; ‘*bdk*) and *my lord* (אֲדֹנָי; ‘*dny*) is conventional deference to a superior, especially the king. Mephibosheth has used both in 2 Sam 9:8, as will Ziba in 16:4. Both have also been used by the Tekoite woman in 14:4 when she presented her legal petition. Abigail has used both to David in 1 Sam 25, when presenting her requests and in her thanks, in her counterfactual scenario setting. In Gen 23:1-16 and 24:52, obeisance appears to be a customary part of negotiations, used when the requesting party perceives negotiations are proceeding favourably for them.<sup>22</sup> However, in Joab’s case, his obeisance and deferential language is surprisingly polite. Normally he is portrayed as blunt to and/or critical of David (2

<sup>21</sup> The lack of rights of foreigners is a concern in the Deuteronomic legislation, which prescribed that foreigners be protected and helped.

<sup>22</sup> In the case of Abraham in Gen 23, the deference is mutual. Abraham *bows* to the Hittites, and the Hittites call him, *my lord* (אֲדֹנָי; *adny*). In contrast, Abimelech’s negotiations with Abimelech in Gen 26:26-31 uses no deferential language or obeisance on the part of any party. This indicates Isaac and Abimelech are equals, but the lack of formalities can be interpreted as due to the hostility between the two, narrated in vv.12-22.

Sam 3:24-25; 19:5-7).<sup>23</sup> In 2 Sam 24:3, he uses deferential speech, but again criticises his king. Thus, in 2 Sam 14:22, Joab's obeisance, though conventional, should be viewed as self-abasement. Note that he does not obligate himself to the king. This is also in keeping with 2 Sam that, though his position automatically implies loyalty to David,<sup>24</sup> he has an independent view of things from his king. However, this unusual-for-Joab obeisance and conventional deference is designed to increase David's 'face', needed after his manipulation of David through the Tekoite woman.

Ziba's thanks to David in 2 Sam 16:4, after David gives him Mephibosheth's assets after concocting a story that Mephibosheth was entertaining treason during Absalom's rebellion (v.3; 19:26-27), "*I do obeisance; let me find favour in your sight, my lord the king*" (NRSV), has the same function as Joab's thanks. It is entirely conventional language and action, and represents Ziba's status as a subject of David. However, in keeping with all persons discussed, Ziba does not obligate himself to David. If anything, he manipulates David, having given provisions for David's followers, which as Mauss' theory on gift-giving would argue, obligates David to him by his acceptance.

In conclusion so far, self-abasement in the context of thanks to another person primarily serves to downplay the speaker's 'face' (i.e. accept a reduction in respect or honour relative to the hearer) in order to increase the 'face' of the giver of a favour or favourable answer to a request (that is, increase the hearer's respect or honour relative to the speaker). This has the effect of highlighting the magnanimity of the hearer. It is an extreme form of deference. Socially, the relationship between receiver and giver is kept unequal, and the giver is shown to be one who has power over the receiver. However, the use of self-abasement means the speaker avoids being obligated to the hearer, which normally happens when gifts or favours are accepted.<sup>25</sup> Self-abasement is only counterfactual to the speaker's situation when the speaker is an equal or social superior to the hearer. Such language adds to the increase in 'face' of the hearer, by portraying the speaker as unworthy to have received what the hearer

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<sup>23</sup> In 2 Sam 11:19-21, Joab second-guesses David's intentions with Uriah, and so his instructions to the messenger can be interpreted as being critical of David. For discussion, see Kieth Bodner, 'Is Joab a Reader-Response Critic?' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (2002) 19-35.

<sup>24</sup> It is frequently asserted that David used murder and intrigue to gain the throne, with Joab playing a large part in David's methods (i.e. assassin). [[See citations in PhD chapter 6. Use if I submit the paper for publication]]

<sup>25</sup> The combination of 1 Samuel 30:26-31 and 2 Samuel 2:1-4 suggests that David's gifts to the leaders of Judah expedited their acceptance of him as their king. Prov 18:16 and 21:14 indicate the power in giving gifts.

has given to him/her. This should alert interpreters that self-abasive language is figurative language, and should be interpreted as such.

### **Self-abasement in the context of thanks – to God**

Unlike for giving thanks to people, in which self-abasement covers for the avoidance of indebtedness to the hearer, thanks to God normally expresses obligation. This is frequent in Psalms (Pss 5:7; 16:7-8; 22:25; 23:6; 27:6; 40:7-8; 54:6; 56:12; 61:8; 63:4, 11; 66:13-15; 116:12-19; 139:23-24; also in 2 Kgs 5:15). Words for ‘thanks’ are also used (e.g., וודה, *wdh*, ‘to give thanks’; תודה, *twdh*, ‘thanksgiving’; ברך, *brk*, ‘to bless’; see e.g. Pss 104:1; 105:1; 106:1; 107:1; 109:30; 111:1; 115:18; 134:1; 135:19-21; 136:1, 26; 144:1; and 147:7). In Psalms, indebtedness to God is expressed by promises to go to the temple or, more specifically, to offer sacrifices. This is to be expected, since psalms are used in worship of God, a situation that presupposes a desire on the part of worshippers to express loyalty to God and perform whatever obligations that loyalty requires.

However, self-abasement does appear on some occasions. In Ps 116, a thanksgiving psalm and in which obligation to God is expressed (vv.12-14, 17-19), self-abasement occurs:

*O LORD, I am your servant;*

*I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.*

*You have loosed my bonds.* (v.16, NRSV)

This has the effect, as discussed above for giving thanks to humans, of lowering the status of the voice in the psalm in relation to God. The lowering of status is done through the metaphorical phrase, *the child of your serving girl* (בן-אמתך; *bn 'mtk*). This calls up an association of slavery, ‘inferior status’; here, playing on either a slave’s low standing in society or lack of legal status. The statement is counterfactual, because the voice is already an object of concern by God. The effect is to magnify God’s concern and help for the voice.

David’s prayer of thanks to God in 2 Sam 7:18-29 also carries self-abasement, represented by his question at the beginning of the prayer, “*Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?*” (v.18; NRSV) The question refers back to his childhood

life as an unknown person in Bethlehem, thus is not metaphorical.<sup>26</sup> But it is counterfactual. One can almost expect God to answer, ‘You are not a nobody! You are the king, the most powerful man in the land!’ But as the prayer proceeds, it is noteworthy that David’s use of self-abasement is in line with what has been discussed for others so far: David does not express obligation on his part to God. This is a rare avoidance of the obligation side of thanks to God, but the narrative has David already in the role of a loyal worshipper of God by having brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6).

A second example of self-abasement in thanks to God without expressing the obligation side, is Jacob’s self-abasement in his prayer in Gen 32:9-12 [MT: 10-13], “*I am unworthy [lit, ‘I am small’] of all the kindnesses and from all the truth which you did [to] your servant*” (v.10 [11] my translation). Here, however, it also prepares for his request of v.12 [v.11]: deliverance from Esau. ‘Kindnesses’ (חסד; *hsd*) refers to his wealth which he gained while working for Laban, which he has already acknowledged as being given to him by God (31:5-13). ‘Small’ (קטן; *qtn*) is the metaphoric term of self-abasement. This is counterfactual to Jacob’s present situation of wealth (30:43), head of a huge household (including servants/slaves), and equal to Laban (proved by the dialogue in 31:26-42). With the use of ‘small’ (קטן; *qtn*), Jacob reduces his ‘standing’ before God and so highlights God as generous: God has favoured someone who is of no importance, a metaphorical import of ‘small’ (קטן; *qtn*). However, ‘small’ (קטן; *qtn*) also alludes to his cheating of Esau of the eldest son’s blessing (ch 27), the point of his preparations to meet Esau and the main topic of conversation once he meets Esau (33:1-17). Thus there is a double play on ‘small’ (קטן; *qtn*): it is counterfactual to Jacob’s present status, but factual to his situation of having cheated Esau and takes the connotation, ‘unworthy’. Jacob has already expressed obligation to God in his vow in 28:20-22, but that God has to remind him later (35:1) shows that obligating himself to God is not a characteristic behaviour of Jacob. Instead, he uses self-abasement to highlight God’s generosity to him, which then becomes a reason for his request to be delivered from Esau, ‘as you have done for me, continue to do so.’

Solomon in his dream-prayer of 1 Kgs 3:5-9, like Jacob, uses self-abasement in thanks for being king, “... *I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in*” (v.7b;

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<sup>26</sup> He has done this once before to initially reject Saul’s offer for him to marry into the royal family (1 Sam 18).

NRSV), as the primary reason God should answer his request (stated in v.9). *Little child* (נער קטן; *n'r qtn*, 'boy small') is the metaphoric term of self-abasement. It carries the association of children as inexperienced. This is counterfactual to Solomon's situation. He is likely to be in his late 20s, and 1 Kgs 1-2 and 1 Chr 23:1 and 29:22 indicate Solomon started his reign before David died. Thus, he already has some experience as a ruler. Even his request for wisdom (v.9) is counterfactual to the narrative; namely he has already been described as wise by David (1 Kgs 2:6-9). Even though his self-abasement means he does not express obligation to God, when he returns to Jerusalem, he offers sacrifices (v.15), unlike Jacob who had to be reminded. Thus the pericope shows Solomon combines both aspects of giving thanks: self-abasement and obligation. This highlights both God's graciousness, and worthiness as Someone to be submitted to.

To conclude, expressing thanks to God involves both direct praise and a willingness to be obligated to God, expressed in a desire to give sacrifices and offerings or generally to go to the temple. When self-abasement is used, it highlights God's favour to the person, but does not usually replace the obligation side of thanks. David in 2 Sam 7 and Jacob in Gen 32 are the only two examples where self-abasement overrides obligation in thanks to God. However, both are recorded as having expressed or shown loyalty to God prior to using self-abasement, though in Jacob's case such loyalty is tenuous. In contrast to giving thanks to God, biblical narrative reflects a culture in which people rarely give direct thanks to another person, and use self-abasement to avoid being indebted to the other as though they had been given a gift. The widening of relative status through the use of self-abasement achieves what would otherwise be done through expressions of obligation.



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