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# **THE INTERCESSION OF THE PROPHET**

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A thesis presented to the faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Exegetical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

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by  
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2000

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

#### 1.1 Defining the Prophetic Office: Introductory Overview

Efforts to describe or define the prophetic office usually emphasize the prophet's office as speaker of Yahweh's word.<sup>1</sup> The focus is upon prophets as messengers of Yahweh to the people. As can be drawn from the many examples where the prophet speaks nothing except the "word of Yahweh" to Israel, the prophet, according to "the Bible's own understanding . . . is something like 'spokesman, interpreter, mediator of God's will.'"<sup>2</sup> Concerning the title *prophet* itself, ultimately the witness of Scripture's own definitions must be respected, for the supposed etymological roots of the word are of little help as they range from "to sweep away" to "to bring news."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, employing Scripture's own witness, Martens describes the prophet as one who was engaged in "making the will of God known to the people . . . persons who received a clear and immediate message from God to take, as messengers, to king or people."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Speiser, for instance, speaks of the prophet as "one who speaks up . . . in the sense of one who speaks (stem *nb* ' ) on behalf of another, specifically God." E.A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 149.

<sup>2</sup> Horace D. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 171.

<sup>3</sup> Laetsch gives a good, brief overview of some of the etymological speculations. Theodore F.K. Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, Bible Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1952), 21-23.

<sup>4</sup> Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 150. Interestingly, a more complete quotation of Martens gives a fuller view of the prophetic office by showing the correlation in which he places the prophet with the priest:

Both prophets and priests were engaged in making the will of God known to the people, but with this fundamental difference: The priests were teachers transmitting the teaching which was found in the law (Dt. 33:7-11), the prophets

The prophetic office originates with Yahweh and his intention to make his will known. The authority of the prophet is traced to the call from Yahweh. When Yahweh calls a man to be prophet, that call is a delivery of divine revelation and a mandate for the man to speak the revealed word to Israel.<sup>5</sup> If the prophetic office is not referenced to Yahweh and his calling of the prophet (as that call is found in Scripture), then it is often derived by categorizing the prophet according to that which is known of prophets and seers in the profane world. This constricts what can be said of the true prophet to what can be said of all prophets in such a way that the prophet of Yahweh is now counted as just one instance among many.

As an example of those who define the prophetic office in sociological terms in a study of history of religions, J. Lindblom lays his groundwork on prophecy in Israel by starting with an exposition of the Greek term for prophet (“*forthteller*”<sup>6</sup>), categorizing the Yahweh prophets under what can be said of all prophets and defining the prophet as one who “receive[s] revelations from the divine world.”<sup>7</sup> He then proceeds to build on that groundwork by positing that unlike the philosopher or religious teacher, the prophet is one “compelled by the spirit.” He describes the prophet as comparable to profane poets or inspired ones who are under some sort

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were persons who received a clear and immediate message from God to take, as messengers.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Albright, in contrast to Speiser, references the title *prophet* to the call: “The current explanation of the word nabhi, ‘prophet,’ as ‘speaker, announcer,’ is almost certainly false. The correct etymological meaning of the word is rather ‘one who is called (by God), one who has a vocation (from God).”

William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), 231-232.

<sup>6</sup> J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Lindblom, *Prophecy*, 1.

of “abnormal force” of compulsion.<sup>8</sup> Lindblom emphasizes the prophet as receiver and revealer, as “a proclaimer of divine revelations.”

Claus Westermann, too, starts by setting the Israelite prophet as “analogous to that of the messenger in the ancient Near East.”<sup>9</sup> Westermann emphasizes the prophet as the deliverer of “messenger-speech.” He speaks of the prophetic “form” of “utterances directed from man to God (prayer).”<sup>10</sup> But he then “[sets] aside the passages in the form of accounts and utterances directed toward God” by establishing that the prophetic word “claims to be God’s word,”<sup>11</sup> which is a word from God to the people. Since intercession is not the prophet accomplishing the prophetic office by delivering “messenger-speech,” prophetic intercession is essentially excluded as integral to the prophetic office.

Others speak of Yahweh’s prophets without reference to knowledge of profane prophets. As an example, Gerhard von Rad speaks of Yahweh’s prophet Nathan as one who “was no ecstatic, and [who] had no connexions with the impassioned, enraptured prophets who were active in the land at the same time.”<sup>12</sup> Von Rad also steers clear of binding the prophets under a category founded upon generalizations drawn from the root of the Greek term: “To translate this

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<sup>8</sup> Lindblom states: “The prophet is compelled by the spirit; and he knows no other rules than the force and the guidance of the divine impulse.” Lindblom, *Prophecy*, 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Gene M. Tucker, forward to *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, by Claus Westermann, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), x.

<sup>10</sup> Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 90.

<sup>11</sup> Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 92-93.

<sup>12</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1962), 11.

[nabi'] by the Greek word 'prophet' does not bring us one inch further forward in our understanding of the matter."<sup>13</sup> Though he is not entirely consistent on this point, John Bright, too, speaks of the prophets of Israel as those who are misunderstood precisely because they "do not lend themselves to comparison with any class or group with which we are familiar."<sup>14</sup>

E. J. Young rejects defining Yahweh's prophets by analogy to profane prophets, and he contends that "if we are to arrive at a proper conception of the function of the *nabhi*, we must look elsewhere than to philology. We must examine the actual usage of the word in the Old Testament."<sup>15</sup> Young sets "the function of prophet" as "that of declaring the word God has given."<sup>16</sup> When Abraham is described as a prophet who intercedes (Genesis 20), Young contends that this intercession is not a "function" of Abraham's prophetic office, but is, rather, intercession mandated only in view of Abraham's "confidential relation with God."<sup>17</sup> This thesis will argue that more is to be said of the prophet's intercession and will examine intercession as it relates to the prophet's office.

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<sup>13</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. II, 7.

<sup>14</sup> John Bright, *Jeremiah*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 21 (New York: Doubleday, 1965), xv. Elsewhere, though, Bright does not let the distinction stand so clearly, as when he says that the prophets at the time of the divided kingdom "represented an ecstatic strain in Yahwism psychologically akin to similar manifestations in almost every religion that has ever existed, including Christianity." John Bright, *A History of Israel*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 249.

<sup>15</sup> Edward J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 57.

<sup>16</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 60. This view of Young's will be examined in chapter 2, which deals with the account of Abraham and Abimelech.

## 1.2 Understanding the Role of Intercession in the Prophetic Office

In speaking of the prophets as prophets of Yahweh, one is able to find the grounding and the description of the prophetic office in the Scriptures. Von Rad ties the prophet to “the framework of the cult” and speaks of him as a holder of “cultic office.”<sup>18</sup> Whether the prophet is located cultically (von Rad) or is located with respect to his role of “one who brought a message that he had received from Yahweh,” over and against those “who had no wish to hear [it],”<sup>19</sup> he is in both cases treated as one who speaks the divine revelation.<sup>20</sup>

By speaking of the prophet practicing intercession “in the framework of the cult,” von Rad holds that intercession is not an incidental activity of the prophet. It is a work that is to be found in the very character of the prophetic office, for “the supreme office through which the proper intercourse between Jahweh and Israel is to be carried out is that of the prophet.”<sup>21</sup> The critical distinction here is that the prophetic office is not one-way: the prophet is intermediary not only in speaking Yahweh’s word to the people, but also in speaking for the people to Yahweh. Along these lines, Hummel gives a definition of the prophetic office that includes the proclamation from Yahweh to Israel and the intercession from Israel to Yahweh:

The Bible’s own understanding of a “prophet” is something like “spokesman,

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<sup>18</sup> For example, von Rad, *O.T. Theology*, vol. I, 97. This is in view of von Rad’s understanding the prophetic office as “developing” in the history of Israel. The bearing this understanding, which entails a presumption of “source documents,” has upon the description of the prophetic office will not be approached in this paper.

<sup>19</sup> Bright, *Jeremiah*, xviii-xix.

<sup>20</sup> Examples of this foundation for the prophetic office are easily found. For example, Martens, *God’s Design*, 150.

<sup>21</sup> Von Rad, *O.T. Theology*, I:99.



interpreter, mediator of God's will"--and in about the most comprehensive sense possible, . . . In this sense, Abraham is a "prophet" (Gen. 20:7) because he intercedes with God for the welfare of Abimelech."<sup>22</sup>

Against this understanding of the prophetic office, others contend that intercession is not proper to the prophetic office at all. Samuel E. Balentine, for example, maintains that "it is important to note that the 'communication' that takes place between Yahweh and his people is described as primarily one-dimensional."<sup>23</sup> He contends that the prophetic intercession on behalf of Yahweh's people is not "integrally involved in some way in the basic nature of the prophetic task."<sup>24</sup>

The question brought to the forefront is this: Is intercession proper to the prophetic office? The thesis of this study is that intercession must be understood as proper to the prophetic office.<sup>25</sup> Prophetic intercession on behalf of the people is to be understood with reference to the institution and nature of the prophetic office. This study will examine this subject by surveying particular accounts of prophetic intercession. This will be done by examining relevant texts, by critically considering relevant commentaries on these texts, and by drawing conclusions from these texts that might shed light on an understanding of the prophetic office. Within the examination of these texts, special consideration will be given to such key words as פלל

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<sup>22</sup> Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 171.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel E. Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 2 (1984): 171-172.

<sup>24</sup> Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment": 172 n.

<sup>25</sup> This thesis is not made over against other offices, such as those of priest and king. This is not a question of intercession as proper to the prophetic office *only*. Rather, when viewing the prophetic office, how is intercession to be understood in the particularity of that office?

(intercede), חלה (entreat), and עתה (make supplication).

The objective will be to probe the narrow and specific subject of the intercession of the prophets in order to see how this can inform the wider subject of the prophetic office. That is, if the prophet's intercession is to be located in the *proprium* of the office, how does this inform the understanding of the prophetic office, and, ultimately, of Christ as the fulfillment of the prophetic office and work?

## CHAPTER 2

### ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION

#### 2.1 Abraham as Prophet

Scripture first uses the word *prophet* in Genesis 20:6-7. It is in reference to Abraham's interceding for Abimelech:<sup>1</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחֵלֶם . . .  
וַעֲתָה הָשֵׁב אִשְׁתְּ-הָאִישׁ כִּי-נָבִיא הוּא וְיִתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַדְךָ וְחַיָּה  
trans.: v.6a. *And God said to him [Abimelech] in a dream, . . .*  
v.7. *"Now therefore, restore the wife of the man [Abraham]; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live."*<sup>2</sup>

The result of Abraham's interceding on his behalf [בער] is that Abimelech would live. The question as it bears upon the prophetic office is, Why is Abraham to intercede? Is his intercession to be understood as caused by the action of Abimelech's returning of his wife, or as result of his being a prophetic intercessor? Clearly the alternatives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and certainly if Abimelech does not return the wife, he should not look forward to this prophetic intercession. But how Abraham's act of intercession is to be understood does depend upon which alternative is primary, even if not exclusive.

To state the question differently, how does the כִּי clause ("for he is a prophet") relate to the subsequent ו clause ("and he will pray for you")? Is this ו clause primarily subject to the

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<sup>1</sup> This verse is used by Rhodes as he lays the groundwork for understanding the prophets as intercessors (in disagreement with, e.g., H. W. Hertzberg). Arnold B. Rhodes, "Israel's Prophets as Intercessors," in *Scripture in History and Theology*, ed. Arthur L. Merrill and Thomas W. Overholt (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1977), 110.

<sup>2</sup> Translations of text from the Hebrew Scriptures are the author's own except where otherwise attributed (e.g., *NASB* or *NKJV*).

imperative at the beginning of verse 7 (“restore the man’s wife”) or to the ו clause (“for he is a prophet”)?

In the former case (the ו clause as subject to the imperative) the ו clause would be treated as parenthetical:

“Now therefore, restore the man’s wife (since he is a prophet), and he will pray for you and you will live.”

In this case, the fact that Abraham is a prophet does not necessarily lead to the result of Abraham interceding; it is simply a description of who this man Abraham happens to be. Causal for Abraham’s interceding is Abimelech’s restoration of his wife: “Restore the man’s wife, and [upon that restoration] he will pray for you, and you will live.” This is the way H.C. Leupold translates the verse (although in his comments Leupold does go much further than this, even indicating that the work of the prophets is to intercede):<sup>3</sup>

“Now therefore restore the wife of the man, for he is a prophet, that he may intercede in thy behalf that thou mayest live.”<sup>4</sup>

Grammatically this would set the ו clause in a causal relationship to the imperative (“Restore the man’s wife”), but not to the ו clause (“and he will pray for you”),<sup>5</sup> which would be

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<sup>3</sup> See below for more concerning Leupold’s treatment. H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), 586.

<sup>4</sup> Leupold, *Genesis*, 584. Others, such as Wenham, give essentially the same translation. Wenham, like Leupold, when giving his commentary, does go much further in pointing out that Abraham is “a forerunner of great prophetic intercessors such as Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah and Amos.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2, (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 71.

<sup>5</sup> In this case, the ו clause could be taken as simply a causal conjunction connecting it to the imperative “Restore the man’s wife.” See, for example, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.E. Cowley (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 492, (326, n.2).

subject to the sentence's beginning imperative. The sentence, which reads,

- A Therefore, restore the man's wife,
- B for he is a prophet,
- C and he will pray for you and you will live.

could be logically rearranged into this sequence,

- A Because the man is a prophet,
- A' you must restore his wife to him;
- B and because you restored his wife,
- B' he will pray for you and you will live.

In this way Westermann ties the gift of life not to anything connected with Abraham the prophet, but to the condition of Abimelech's action:

“the acquittal is tied to a condition--ועתה . Abimelech must give the woman back to Abraham. Basically this results from Abimelech's own asseveration of innocence (v.5).”<sup>6</sup>

This sequence is less than satisfactory in the full context, for if this were the correct rendering of the verse, then the description of Abraham as a prophet would seem somewhat out of place, even artificial. In this case, the import of God's statement that Abraham is a prophet would refer Abimelech not to Abraham's prophetic office as an office particularly of intercession but would stress that especially since Abraham is a prophet, Abimelech should be careful to act properly toward him. Abraham as prophet is disjointed from Abraham as the one giving intercession (there is no causal relationship), so that even though Abraham is set before Abimelech as a prophet, nevertheless, Abraham exercises no proper prophetic authority.

The untenability of rendering “for he is a prophet” as only descriptive of Abraham's

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<sup>6</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, trans. John J. Scullion, S.J. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 323.

character and not as causal is actually signaled by Westermann himself when he claims that the clause is a contrived insertion.<sup>7</sup> According to Westermann,

“The word *prophet* is not used here of Abraham in a technical but rather in a general sense: he is a ‘man of God,’ an intercessor, familiar to a later era;... Abraham has thereby become a distinguished godly man of that era.”<sup>8</sup>

This leaves the title *prophet* as describing Abraham not according to his office, but according to his character or standing, much like saying “he is a righteous one” (according to his character) or “he is not a poor man, but a prophet” (according to standing). Both options must be rejected. The first may be rejected because in this particular instance it is manifest that the reference is not to Abraham’s character at all since the problem at hand is a result of Abraham’s deceit in 20:2. If the title *prophet* is a reference to Abraham’s character, it would then need to be taken as a description contradicting his own actions; reading, then, something such as:

“Although Abraham has acted dishonorably toward you, Abimelech, nevertheless is he honorable (i.e., ‘he is a prophet’).” The recognition that the title *prophet* cannot here refer to character presses the point that it refers to office, especially when the prophet’s character, or actions, contradict the nature of the office.<sup>9</sup>

It may also be recognized in canonical context that the title prophet is not a title of

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<sup>7</sup> Westermann states: “The sentence which gives the reason in the middle of v. 7 does not match the context well; nor is it really the reason for the demand in v7a. . . . Its insertion is here contrived.” Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 324.

<sup>8</sup> Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 324.

<sup>9</sup> Von Rad makes note of the “authorized intercession” of the prophet, and notes the occurrence of “the ambiguous role of a guilty prophet who was nevertheless authorized by God,” citing I Kings 13:11ff. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis, The Old Testament Library*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972): 228-230.

character but of office.<sup>10</sup> This leads also to the rejection of the second option, that the title prophet refers to social standing or position.<sup>11</sup> As Leupold notes,

“to press the meaning of the word [prophet] down to the level where it means only a ‘man of God, whose person and property are inviolable’ is a procedure warranted by no Scripture, and so merely an attempt to deflate terms.”<sup>12</sup>

Taking the ו clause as parenthetical is untenable to the extent that it sets the phrase “for he is a prophet” as irrelevant to the passage’s context. The immediate context is the promise to Abimelech that Abraham the prophet will pray for him and thus Abimelech will live. The fuller canonical context gives the prophet not according to his character but to his appointment and office from Yahweh.

If it is not contextually tenable to set the ו clause as parenthetical to the ו clause (“and he will intercede for you”), then in the latter case mentioned above (the ו clause as subject to the ו clause), the imperative (“restore the man’s wife”) would be independent with regard to the ו clause, with the ו clause as causal to the clause it precedes, “he will pray for you.” The sentence would then be understood in sequence:

- A Now therefore, restore the man’s wife;
- B for he is a prophet
- B' and [because he is a prophet] he will pray for you.

This leaves hanging the initial imperative clause (“Now therefore, restore the man’s wife”). In

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Isaiah 6:5.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Amos 7:14-15. Also with Jeremiah, he is to know that his prophetic commission has nothing to do with his social status, for he is only a youth (Jeremiah 1:4-7).

<sup>12</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 586.

this case, the imperative clause would simply be referenced back to the preceding verse for its antecedent, so that the more complete context would have this sequence:

[God said:]  
A     *You* [Abimelech] did this in the integrity of your heart,  
B     and *I* myself even held you back from sinning against me;  
B'           therefore *I* did not let you touch her;  
A'           therefore *you* [Abimelech] restore the man's wife.  
C     For *he* [Abraham] is a prophet  
C'           and [because he is a prophet] *he* will pray for you,  
A"<sup>13</sup>           and [as a result] *you* will live.

Rather than the title prophet referencing Abraham's character, thereby setting his purported character in contradistinction to his actions (as with Westermann, above), the title prophet may correctly be understood as referencing the office conferred upon Abraham. The office does indeed find itself opposed by Abraham's actions of deceitfulness. But the title of prophet prevails precisely because the office finds its origin not at all in Abraham, but in the word of Yahweh.

This is not to the diminishment of Abimelech's action to restore Abraham's wife. Abimelech's action does have consequence, for if he does not restore the wife, he will die (20:7b). Nevertheless, while death will be caused by wrong action on Abimelech's part, the prime causation of life for Abimelech is not right action on Abimelech's part, but the gracious action on Yahweh's part. This point is underscored by Yahweh's pronouncement that even Abimelech's right action of not having originally committed adultery with Abraham's wife was principally due not to Abimelech's righteousness, but to Yahweh's acting toward Abimelech in

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<sup>13</sup> וְחַיָּה (see further note on this imperative in section 2.3).



grace (20:6):<sup>14</sup>

“Then God said to [Abimelech] in a dream, ‘Indeed, I myself know that in the integrity of your heart you did this, and, indeed, I myself kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not grant you to touch her.’”

## 2.2 The Prophet Intercedes

The critical statement “for he is a prophet and he will pray for you” can now be examined (20:7):

כִּי־נָבִיא הוּא וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעֶרְךָ וַיְחַיֶּה

trans.: “For he is a prophet,

and he will pray [intercede] for you and you will live.”

Victor P. Hamilton notes that Yahweh’s designation of Abraham as prophet can be taken one of two ways, either as “identification and explication” or as “cause and effect.”<sup>15</sup> In the first case, Abraham is identified as a prophet, then it is explained that this is what prophets do: “intercede for you.” In the second case, Abraham is identified as a prophet, and because he is a prophet he will carry out his office by interceding. The difference itself would not seem to be critical for

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<sup>14</sup> As given by Leupold,

“Failure to adjust the wrong done will bring with it certain death . . . [But] that such protection is entirely unmerited goes without saying, for His saints too were fallible human beings, as our story indicates only too clearly.”

Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 587.

<sup>15</sup> A fuller representation of Hamilton’s line of reasoning gives these two proposals:

1. (a) identification (“he is a prophet”) and (b) explication (“i.e., he is one who prays for you”)

or

2. (a) identification/cause (“he is a prophet”) and (b) effect (“therefore he will pray for you”).

Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, The New International Commentary on The Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 64.

this examination since in both cases Abraham intercedes *as* prophet. The critical distinction is that Abraham intercedes as prophet, according to the office. The prophetic intercession to Yahweh on behalf of the sinner is proper to the exercise of the prophetic office.

Young divides the two, essentially accepting the first (identification and explication) and rejecting the second (cause and effect).<sup>16</sup> For Young, intercession by the prophet is not proper to the office, only incidental. Young holds that reading Genesis 20:7 as a verse that “may give the impression that a *nabhi* is here conceived as one who intercedes for others, but not as one who declares the message of God to others,” is giving the verse a “superficial” reading.<sup>17</sup> Young contends that when Abraham is designated as a prophet, “we are to understand that he is one who may intercede successfully on behalf of others,” because as prophet he “stands in a peculiarly close relationship with God.” By finding the authority for Abraham’s intercession in his “close relationship with God,” Young is then able to hold that this

passage really says nothing one way or the other with respect to the function of the *nabhi*. It does not teach that his function is exclusively that of intercession. Indeed, it does not even teach that his function is that of intercession. It merely points out that a *nabhi* is one who can make prevailing intercession with God. It stresses, in other words, the close and intimate relationship which existed between the *nabhi* and God. Its emphasis is not upon the office of prophet, but upon his confidential relation with God.<sup>18</sup>

Before examining Young’s analysis, it should be noted that it is given in the context of

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<sup>16</sup> While not using terminology identical to Hamilton’s (where Hamilton distinguishes between “identification and explication” versus “cause and effect”), Young (writing some fifty years prior to Hamilton) speaks to the same question when addressing “The Terminology of Prophetism.” Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 56-61.

<sup>17</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 60.

<sup>18</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 60.

his contention that the prophet must be understood as “a speaker who declared the word that God had given him.” In the face of mistaken understandings of the prophetic office that have defined the office philologically from the root of the word *nabhi*, Young is contending for a theologically derived understanding for the office originating from “the actual usage of the word in the Old Testament.”<sup>19</sup> According to Young, a prophet is “a man who speaks forth a message.”<sup>20</sup>

The critical point for Young is to set the prophet as being the actual mouthpiece of God: “For God to speak with His mouth and to speak through His prophets is the same thing.”<sup>21</sup> Young maintains that “the function of a *nabhi* was to speak a message on behalf of a superior.”<sup>22</sup> Young’s insistence upon setting the prophet as Yahweh’s actual mouthpiece is correct, and his emphasis is certainly understandable in the context. But the emphasis upon the prophet’s role of speaking Yahweh’s word need not imply that prophetic intercession is not also a function of the prophetic office. Young’s argument that the Genesis account of Abraham “does not teach that [the prophet’s] function is exclusively that of intercession” is, of course, correct as far as it goes. But exclusivity of intercession is in no way at stake.

Then Young states that the account “does not even teach that his function is that of

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<sup>19</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 56-59.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. to Friedrich who notes, “The OT prophets are the mouth of God through which He speaks to men . . . the prophet is not the true speaker but God, who uses the prophet when He addresses the people.” Gerhard Friedrich, “προφητης,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), IV:831 (hereafter cited as *TDNT*).

<sup>21</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 59.

<sup>22</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 60.

intercession,” and that Abraham’s intercession only points to “the close and intimate relationship which existed between the *nabhi* and God.” This gives as the basis of intercession a “close relationship” to God, not intercession as a result of the revealed word of Yahweh. On the other hand, when speaking of the prophetic function to speak for Yahweh, Young appeals not to the close relationship to God at all, but to Yahweh’s word and command:

the essential nature of the prophetic function is clearly set forth: “. . . and I shall place My words in his mouth, and he will speak unto them all which I command him.” Here the function of the prophet is that of declaring the word which God has given.<sup>23</sup>

If this understanding is carried through consistently, then intercession *to* Yahweh, as also declaration *from* Yahweh, may be understood not according to the prophet’s personal “closeness” to Yahweh, but according to what is given of the prophetic office in Yahweh’s word and command.

The essential question would seem to be, Does understanding the prophetic office as one of speaking for Yahweh exclude the understanding of the prophet as one who properly intercedes *to* Yahweh? If the two functions are mutually exclusive, then intercession will be ruled out, for the prophet is clearly given the mandate to speak on behalf of Yahweh. But is this not an unnecessarily one-dimensional constriction of the prophetic office?

The other dimension of the prophetic office is found in this account of Abraham and Abimelech, where Abraham is presented as one who is to speak words to Yahweh:

כִּי־נָבִיא הוּא וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַדְךָ

trans.: *For he is a prophet and will intercede on your behalf.*

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<sup>23</sup> Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, 57-58.

The intercession [פלל] of Abraham is בעד, “on behalf,” of another.<sup>24</sup> The word בעד sets Abraham in the position of speaking in the place of another, as substitute, as that person’s mouthpiece. In Leviticus, בעד gives the relationship of the priest to the people (Leviticus 9:7):

... וְכִפֵּר בְּעֵדָךְ וּבְעֵד הָעָם וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת־קִרְבַּן הָעָם וְכִפֵּר בְּעֵדָם...  
trans.: ... make atonement on behalf of yourself and on behalf of the people. Then make the offering of the people, and make atonement on their behalf.”

The priest stands in the place of the sinner in such a way that the action accomplished by the priest is in stead of the sinner.<sup>25</sup> For the sinner to stand before the face of holy Yahweh, atonement must first be made. The sinner has brought the sacrifice to the service (Leviticus 9:3-6), but the sacrifice is actually done by the priest who has already been declared “holy to Yahweh,”<sup>26</sup> and who has first made atonement on his own behalf (Leviticus 9:7). In doing [עשה] the sacrifice, the holy priest makes atonement in the stead of the people, on their behalf. The preposition בעד makes the point that what is done is done on account of another, it is substitutionary. This is according to the ordering set in place by Yahweh,<sup>27</sup> who has placed a

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<sup>24</sup> Gesenius notes the meaning “pro” or “for” from “the sense of exchanging” for בעד. William Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 129.

Cf. “for the sake of, on account of” and “on behalf of (i.e. take the place of, serve as)” as given in *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, ed. Francis Brown (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 126.

<sup>25</sup> ויעמדו לפני יהוה, Leviticus 9:5.

<sup>26</sup> קדש יהוה, Exodus 39:30.

<sup>27</sup> Leviticus 9:6: “This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded [צוה] you,” and Leviticus 9:7: “as Yahweh has commanded [צוה]”--צוה giving the emphasis that the priest’s standing in the stead, acting on behalf, of the sinner [בעד] is action being carried out according to Yahweh’s

mediator to stand in the stead [בער] of the sinner. The priest is acting according to his office as it has been mandated by Yahweh.

In Abimelech's case, too, it is according to Yahweh's mandate that a mediator will stand in the place [בער] of the sinner (Genesis 20:6-7):

And God said [אמר] to [Abimelech] in a dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the wife of the man [Abraham]; for he is a prophet, and he will pray for [בער] you and you will live."

That Yahweh condescends to speak to Abimelech at all is significant.<sup>28</sup> The אמר אלהים, the speaking of God, is, at first, simple communication disclosing instruction or intention.<sup>29</sup> But this disclosure is placed before the adverb עתה,<sup>30</sup> serving as antecedent to the sentence's first imperative verb שוב.

This informs the understanding of the whole sentence, 20:6-7. F. I. Andersen speaks of

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mandate, and is thus all for the penultimate purpose that "the glory of Yahweh would be made visible" (Leviticus 9:6), toward the ultimate purpose that atonement would be made for the people (Leviticus 9:7).

<sup>28</sup> As von Rad states, "It is audacious . . . to consider the heathen worthy of an address, indeed, a personal conversation with Yahweh." Von Rad, *Genesis*, 228. Cf. Schmid, "when he [Yahweh] keeps quiet, he is disturbed." H.H. Schmid, "אמר," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), I:161 (hereafter cited as *TLOT*).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Siegfried Wagner, "אמר," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), I:331 (hereafter cited as *TDOT*).

<sup>30</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים . . . וְעַתָּה הָשֵׁב אִשְׁתְּהָאִישׁ  
trans: *And God said to him . . . Therefore, return the wife of the man . . .*  
עתה here "used as a word of incitement," since it is followed by an imperative, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 662.

the sentence as “conjoined imperative clauses,”<sup>31</sup> looking at the two imperative verbs, שׁוּב (return!) and חַיֵּה (live!). This leaves the כִּי clause and its antecedent ו clause (“for he is a prophet and he will intercede on your behalf”) as “two clauses inserted” in the middle of a conjunctive sentence.<sup>32</sup> But inserted for what objective?

The whole sentence may be understood in the context of the אָמַר אֱלֹהִים. Along with the imperative שׁוּב (“return the man’s wife!”), the promise of prophetic intercession now comes to Abimelech as the way mandated by Yahweh for Abimelech to be given life (וְחַיֵּה: 20:7).<sup>33</sup> The final imperative חַיֵּה is the objective of the whole sentence.<sup>34</sup>

All that precedes is causal to the objective (“so that you live! [חַיֵּה]”). The explication of grace (“I [Yahweh] withheld you from sinning against me”), the imperative to restore, and the stationing of a prophet with the promise of substitutionary intercession, now fall under the אָמַר אֱלֹהִים. The בָּעֵר, as Martens notes, “underscores the mediating function of leaders, including prophets, in intercession.”<sup>35</sup> Abraham is interceding not simply as Abraham, but

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<sup>31</sup> Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 108.

<sup>32</sup> Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 108.

<sup>33</sup> Wagner, for instance, makes the point that אָמַר often expresses the “demands of God,” and is at times used synonymously with צוּרָה. Wagner, “אָמַר,” *TDOT*, I:332-333, 337. (Concerning צוּרָה, see above, section 2.2, footnote 27.)

<sup>34</sup> Gesenius cites this passage as an instance where the dependent imperative “expresses a . . . consequence which is to be expected with certainty . . . a consequence which is intended, or in fact an intention.” *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 325.

<sup>35</sup> Elmer A. Martens, “אָמַר,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), I:118 (hereafter cited as *TWOT*).

according to an office of standing in place of, as advocate for another, as established by the word of Yahweh.

When the prophet Abraham “prays” or “intercedes” for Abimelech (Genesis 20:7 and 20:17), the word is פלל, Hithpael form. In all but four instances where it is Piel the word is used in its Hithpael form.<sup>36</sup> The primary meaning of the word in its Piel form is, “sit in judgment,” or “arbitrate,”<sup>37</sup> or even “mediate.”<sup>38</sup> This meaning can be observed at Isaiah 16:3, where פללה is used in conjunction with עצה (counsel), stressing judgment, arbitration:

Bring counsel [עצה],  
make arbitration [פללה].<sup>39</sup>

The word carries a forensic force, as is seen when it is set parallel to צדק at Ezekiel 16:52:

פְּלַלְתְּ לְאָחוֹתַי . . .  
בְּצַדִּיקְתְּ אֲחֵיֹתַי  
trans: *You made judgment for your sisters . . .  
in your justification of your sisters.*

In its Hithpael form, פלל may be understood to include the meaning of “pray” or

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<sup>36</sup> The four instances of Piel usage are: Genesis 48:11; 1 Samuel 2:25; Ezekiel 16:52; Psalm 106:30. The word is found in its Hithpael form in more than seventy instances.

<sup>37</sup> *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of The Old Testament*, ed. William L. Holladay (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986): 292.

<sup>38</sup> *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of The Old Testament*, eds. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, n.d.): 813.

<sup>39</sup> The difficulty in translating פלל can be observed by considering the different translations of its noun form at Isaiah 16:3, which range from “render a decision” (NIV), to “act as an arbitrator” (AT, Beck).

Speiser, making a point of the connotation of judgment, gives this translation for the verse: “Give council, display judgment.” E.A. Speiser, “The Stem PLL in Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 304.



“intercede.”<sup>40</sup> However, this shift in meaning (from the Piel’s “make arbitration” to the Hithpael’s “pray,” “intercede”) may be overstated. Speiser notes that there are instances where the two forms carry the same meaning, finding both forms coalescing at the point of the “underlying concept” of making assessment.<sup>41</sup> In the end, פלל might be understood not only as a general reference to prayer but more specifically as speaking of a particular, even forensic, context of arbitration or mediation.<sup>42</sup> Speiser suggests it means “to seek assessment” or “to intercede on behalf of others.”<sup>43</sup>

With regard to Abimelech, God has already pronounced the verdict,<sup>44</sup> and the king has already argued his own case to God, pleading his innocence and Abraham’s guilt.<sup>45</sup> But Abimelech’s legal argument, though true, will not reverse the verdict. Yahweh’s verdict for Abimelech will be reversed from death [מות] to life [חיה] only according to the arbitration set in

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<sup>40</sup> E.g., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*: 813, and *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*: 292-293.

<sup>41</sup> He notes 1 Samuel 2:25 and Psalm 106:30. Speiser, “The Stem PLL in Hebrew”: 305.

<sup>42</sup> Staehli notes that “*pll* hith. should probably not be distinguished from the root *pll* that occurs in the OT....largely with a juridical usage.” H.-P. Staehli, “פלל,” *TLOT*, 2:991.

For the emphasis of “to act as mediator,” see also D.R. Ap-Thomas, “Notes on Some Terms Relating to Prayer,” *Vetus Testamentum* VI (1956): 238.

Cf. also Hamilton, who mentions “the traditional explanation is that the Hithpael is connected with *plilim* ‘judges’ and hence, *hitpallel* means to ‘invoke God as judge.’” Victor P. Hamilton, “פלל,” *TWOT*, II:726.

<sup>43</sup> Speiser, “The Stem PLL in Hebrew”: 306.

<sup>44</sup> 20:3: “But God came to Abimelech in a dream at night, and said to him, ‘Behold, you are dead because of the woman you have taken, for she is married to a husband.’”

<sup>45</sup> 20:4-5: “[Abimelech] said, ‘Lord, will you kill a nation, though innocent [צדיק]? Did [Abraham] not himself say to me, “she is my sister?””

place by Yahweh, the return of the wife and the intercession [פּלִל] of the prophet.

### 2.3 Conclusion

At Genesis 20:1-18 the text does not report an explicit commission into an office for Abraham.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, it is by Yahweh's declaration that Abraham is set forth as a prophet. Even though God delivers words of condemnation to Abimelech in a dream (v.3), God directs Abimelech to his prophet (v.7) for deliverance.<sup>47</sup> That which ensues for Abimelech and Abraham is according to the mandate of Yahweh (20:6). Abraham is identified specifically as a prophet (נְבִיא), and because (כִּי) he is a prophet he will stand in Abimelech's place (בְּעֵד) in order to intercede (פּלִל) for a favorable verdict, צְדִיק (cf., 20:4). The intercession of the prophet is all towards the objective of a favorable judgment of life (וְחַיָּה) from Yahweh.

With regard to Abraham's prophetic office, this is consistent with the preceding account in which he intercedes for Sodom (18:16-33). As G. Wenham notes, the title נְבִיא "sums up exactly the role ascribed to [Abraham] in chap. 18."<sup>48</sup> In chapter 18 Abraham "is initiated into

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<sup>46</sup> The aspect of the prophetic call will be examined more in chapter 3, with regard to Moses.

<sup>47</sup> Keil and Delitzsch make the point very strongly: ". . . God described Abraham as a prophet, whose intercession alone could remove his [Abimelech's] guilt, to show him the way of salvation . . . [Abraham] could intercede for sinners, and atone for sins of infirmity through his intercession." C.F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch, Commentary on the Old Testament*, v. 1, trans. James Martin (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989): 240.

<sup>48</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 69.

the counsels of God,<sup>49</sup> he is “admitted to the secrets of the divine council,”<sup>50</sup> as he is given to see what Yahweh intends to do concerning Sodom.<sup>51</sup> He then “stands before”<sup>52</sup> Yahweh and speaks on behalf of Sodom.

Yahweh responds to the prophet’s intercession, for indeed it is Yahweh who has placed the prophet in this mediating position. The intercession of the prophet is efficacious, such that after Abraham intercedes to God full restoration is given to Abimelech (20:17):

Then Abraham interceded [חַפְּלִל] to God; and God healed Abimelech, and his wife and his female servants, and they bore.

Since all this is set in place by Yahweh’s instruction, the outcome of the prophet’s intercession is Yahweh’s intended result of life given to the sinner. In this account of Abraham, the explicit emphasis is not upon the prophet delivering God’s word to the sinner (though this is in no way excluded), but upon the prophet’s interceding with Yahweh on behalf of the sinner.

The implication for the prophetic office is extraordinary. Yahweh has stationed his prophet Abraham as the weaker party before the stronger party, Abimelech, king of Gerar (20:2). Additionally, Abraham stands as the one guilty of deceit, Abimelech as the party wronged. Yet,

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<sup>49</sup> Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 544.

<sup>50</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 69.

As Hamilton notes, “to Abraham, and to his prophetic successors after him, inside knowledge of divine operations is revealed.” Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, 18-50*: 17.

<sup>51</sup> At Genesis 18 Yahweh says, “Will I hide [כִּסֶּה] from Abraham what I myself will do [עֲשֶׂה]?” In the context of Yahweh’s council, and with regard to the prophetic office, כִּסֶּה here may be compared to the antonymous use of גָּלָה at Amos 3:7 where Yahweh says he does not do [עֲשֶׂה] a word, a thing [דְּבַר], but that he reveals [גָּלָה] his counsel to his prophets (about which, see below, chapter 5).

<sup>52</sup> עָמַד לְפָנַי יְהוָה (18:22).

though it is due to Abraham's deceit that Abimelech now stands objectively guilty, Abimelech is nevertheless directed to appeal to the weaker party, Abraham, for deliverance from Yahweh's justice. As von Rad states, "the personal blamelessness of the heathen king is delineated . . . to the profound humiliation of Abraham."<sup>53</sup>

That Abraham recognizes his position of weakness with regard to Abimelech is clearly demonstrated by his attempt to minimize his own vulnerability by deceiving Abimelech. The weakness only deepens into humiliation as King Abimelech identifies Abraham as the one who has wronged him.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, apart from the return of the wife and the intercession by the prophet, Abimelech will not have life. In this account, the first time that Scripture uses the title, the prophet stands vulnerable in humiliation before his superior, the king. But Abimelech is informed that though Abraham is subject to him, nevertheless, it is Abraham alone who will make the intercession on his behalf before Yahweh. Von Rad contends that "the gift of effective intercession....was what made a man a real prophet," thus connecting Abraham's role of interceding with that of the prophet Moses.<sup>55</sup> We now turn to the intercessions of Moses.

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<sup>53</sup> Von Rad: "The king infringed on another's marriage which was absolutely protected by the divinity. This is an objective fact, quite apart from premeditation or ignorance, which severely implicates him." Von Rad, *Genesis*, 228.

<sup>54</sup> 20:9: "Abimelech said, ' . . . What have you done to us? How have I offended you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done deeds to me that ought not to be done.'"

<sup>55</sup> Von Rad states: "The gift of effective intercession, according to an older conception, was what made a man a real prophet (Numbers 12.13; 21.7; Deuteronomy 9.26)." Von Rad, *Genesis*, 229.

Von Rad, of course, gives this view according to his presumption of a "development" of the understanding of the prophetic office whereby this emphasis on intercession is particular to the *earlier* stage of development. For background, von Rad also states that when the title of prophet is given to Abraham (Gen. xx.7), or to Moses (Deut.

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xviii.15, xxxiv.10, etc.) . . . this is to be taken as representing the way in which a much later age looked upon these people. It is an anachronism.

Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II:12.

Von Rad would let emphasis be assigned to intercession as the prophetic office is found in its early stages, finding the more developed emphasis in the later stages of the prophetic office to be in the prophet's proclamation, in the eschatological message. Nevertheless, the intercession of the prophetic office is not at all dependent upon von Rad's presumption of the "development" of the office over time. Indeed, rather than the roots of intercession being found in the "early stages" of the prophetic office, the current thesis would contend that one need not speak of "stages" at all, for the roots are to be found in the nature of the office itself, extending from early (Abraham, Moses) to late (Amos, Jeremiah, etc.).

## CHAPTER 3

### MOSES' INTERCESSION

#### 3.1 The Call of Moses

In the third chapter of Exodus, Yahweh calls Moses to be his deliverer for his people Israel:

. . . the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me, and also I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians have been driving them. So now go, for I will send you to Pharaoh so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out from Egypt. (3:9-10)

Moses is not here explicitly referred to as prophet.<sup>1</sup> The noun *prophet* does not occur in Exodus until chapter 7, and that in reference to Aaron. Nevertheless, Moses receives the commission to liberate Yahweh's people. In the following verses the name Yahweh is bestowed, the importance of which is unfolded as later prophets authenticate their message by appealing to the name:

“Hear the word which Yahweh speaks to you, O Israel” or, “the word of Yahweh came to [a certain prophet]”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rhodes notes that “the call of Moses in Exod. 3:1-4:17 (JE) [*sic*] is essentially the call to be a prophet, even though the word *nabi* is not used in the context. Various factors bear witness to this.” Arnold B. Rhodes, “Israel’s Prophets as Intercessors,” *Scripture in History and Theology*, 111.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Isaiah 1:10, Jeremiah 10:1. Young notes that the imperative (“hear!”) “focus[es] attention upon the message” while by the phrase “the word of the Yahweh” the prophet “does not call attention to his own words, but to what God has spoken. *Davar* is a technical term for the prophetic revelation considered as absolutely authoritative.” Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 60.

At Jeremiah 26:12-13 the prophet speaks of the hearing of words out of his own mouth as being the hearing of “the voice of Yahweh”: “all the words you have heard [שמע] . . . Now, therefore . . . hear [שמע] the voice of Yahweh.”

For “the word of Yahweh came,” see, for example, Jeremiah 11:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1. Smith makes this note about the verb *היה* for the word: “The word of Yahweh is described as

Moses is “appointed deliverer of Israel,” an office which will be carried out by the delivery of words and deeds in Yahweh’s name.<sup>3</sup> The name, the words, and the deeds go together, so that after Moses speaks of delivering the words (“I myself will go to the sons of Israel and I will say [אמר] to them”), he then requests to have the name revealed: “When they say to me, ‘What is his name?’ what will I say to them?” (Exodus 3:13) Yahweh’s answer, giving the name, establishes Moses’ authority to speak in the stead of that name (3:14):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה  
וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:  
trans.: *And God said to Moses, “I Am who I Am,”*  
*Then he said, “You will say this to the sons of Israel,*  
*‘I Am has sent me to you.’”*

The point that Moses does not explicitly receive the title *prophet* in this portion of Exodus is not finally instructive. Moses clearly is identified by this title elsewhere (e.g., Numbers 12:6-8; Deuteronomy 34:10; Hosea 12:13), and elements are here present that are common to the calling of other prophets, such as the “sending” (v. 12) of Moses by God.<sup>4</sup>

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one which ‘came.’ ‘Came,’ like ‘happened’ points to the fact that it had its origin outside the prophet.” Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 32 (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1976), 58.

Durham speaks of Moses as called “to be [Yahweh’s] agent of deliverance.” John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3, (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 32.

<sup>4</sup> Rhodes identifies four points of similarity between the call of Moses and the calls of other prophets:

The “here am I” of Moses (3:4) reminds us of the “Here am I” of Isa 6:8. God’s sending Moses (3:10, 13-14) is paralleled by God’s sending the later prophets (Isa 6:8; Jer 1:7). God promises to be with Moses (3:12) and Jeremiah (1:8). Moses and the later prophets receive and bear God’s message to their own people and to others (Exod 7:16. 9:13).

Of importance is that Yahweh has sent Moses to serve as his mediator, as “messenger of the word of God.”<sup>5</sup> Israel’s deliverance is bound to the words of Yahweh that Moses will declare [רַבֵּר] <sup>6</sup> to Pharaoh in Yahweh’s name, and Pharaoh’s refusal (לֹא שָׁמַע) <sup>7</sup> of those words of Yahweh brings his destruction and Israel’s release.

Sometimes a distinction is drawn between mediator on the one hand and intercessor on the other. Here intercessor would denote the office not only of praying to God, but of praying to God, by virtue of that office, on behalf of another,<sup>8</sup> while mediator would denote the office of delivering God’s word to his people and to others. This distinction would be derived in large part from form-criticism’s identification of a “messenger formula,” where the message’s legitimacy is to be found almost exclusively in the messenger’s formula of delivery. Westermann is able to contend that “*the formula* authorizes the message, which is repeated by the messenger before the addressee, to be the word of the sender”<sup>9</sup> (emphasis added). The

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Rhodes, “Israel’s Prophets as Intercessors”: 111. See also, Terence Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Exodus 6:11.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 7:16, 11:9.

<sup>8</sup> Balentine, while arguing against intercession as proper to the prophetic office, states that “an intercessor is one who ‘intercedes for’ or ‘prays for’ another person(s). The key element is the idea of praying ‘for.’” Samuel E. Balentine, “The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment”: 162.

<sup>9</sup> Westermann, “*Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*,” 100. (See also p. 11.)



prophet is understood “from the viewpoint of message-transmission procedure.”<sup>10</sup> While viewing the prophet strictly as message transmitter or mediator (but not intercessor according to Balentine’s distinctions above) may not entirely preclude intercession, it will tend to reduce intercession to a tangential or accidental function of the prophetic office. As Balentine puts it, while it may be a “legitimate prophetic activity,” intercession nevertheless “seems to have been consistently overshadowed by the prophet’s responsibility to receive and communicate the true word of God.”<sup>11</sup>

The prophet’s office entails the reception and communication of the word of Yahweh. But the call of Moses is, in the first case, the call to be sent forth to *deliver* Yahweh’s people (3:10):

וַעֲתָה לָכֵּה וְאַשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל-פְּרַעֲוֹה  
 וְהוֹצֵא אֶת-עַמִּי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם  
 trans.: *So now go, for I will send you to Pharaoh, and bring out my  
 people, the sons of Israel, from Egypt.*

The mandate to Moses is formed by the two imperatives: “Go!” [הלך] and “Bring out!” [יצא]. Yahweh is sending Moses in order to achieve the ultimate purpose of Israel’s deliverance [יצא].<sup>12</sup> As F.J. Helfmeyer points out, “when someone goes, he does not set forth without any

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<sup>10</sup> Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 102. Westermann is speaking of “prophetic speech as a messenger’s speech,” which, he contends, is valid for only a certain era, specifically the “prophetic era,” that is, “almost exactly the time of the kingdoms.” According to Westermann, the “message style” is simply the style appropriated from known contemporary forms. (See pp. 103-104 and p. 93.)

<sup>11</sup> Balentine, “The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment,” 172.

<sup>12</sup> Sauer notes that the imperative form of הלך is “frequently used in combination with another verb to strengthen a demand.” Sauer, “הלך,” *TLOT*, I:368.

starting point or goal,”<sup>13</sup> and here the goal of the “Go!” will be the accomplishment of the **יצא**:

Bring out my people!

The task of delivering those who are his is something Yahweh claims as his own. Two verses previous (v.8), he tells Moses that he, Yahweh, will deliver [**נצל**] his people and will bring them up [**עלה**] from the constriction of Egypt to a good and spacious land. Largely synonymous with **ישע**,<sup>14</sup> the verb **נצל** can give “overtones of violence in rescue,” meaning “to tear away from, to snatch forth.”<sup>15</sup> It “applies to divine salvation from any distress,”<sup>16</sup> so that Psalm 34 can speak of deliverance from “*all* their afflictions” [**צרה**], deliverance from the many “evils” and “calamities” [**רעה**]. In the Psalm, those declared righteous cry out to Yahweh. He hears the prayer, and he delivers [**נצל**].<sup>17</sup>

Now Yahweh who delivers sends [**שלח**] Moses. The one sent acts by the authority of the

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<sup>13</sup> F.J. Helfmeyer, “הלך,” *TDOT*, III:391.

<sup>14</sup> Psalm 34 gives the repetition of setting the two verbs alongside each other to speak of Yahweh’s deliverance:

v.4, **נצל** / v.6, **ישע** / v.17, **נצל** / v.18, **ישע** / v.19, **נצל**.

Bergmann draws a general distinction between the two verbs, **נצל** speaking of “removal from the realm of oppression,” **ישע** signifying “the removal of the oppressor.” U. Bergmann, “נצל,” *TLOT*, II:761.

Nevertheless, in view of the writer’s use of **ישע** in Psalm 34 (at least when used with **מן**, v.6), the distinction would seem to be not all that definite. Certainly **נצל** in the Exodus context will encompass not only “removal from the realm of oppression,” Egypt, but also “the removal of the oppressor,” Pharaoh.

<sup>15</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> U. Bergmann, “נצל,” *TLOT*, II:761.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 34:15, 17-19.

one who sends, שלח indicating that what Moses is to do will be done in the discharge of a mission, of an office bestowed.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, Yahweh will execute the promised deliverance of Exodus 3:8 by setting Moses as deliverer to act in his stead. Because Moses is sent (i.e., is acting according to authority), all that he does to accomplish the deliverance will fall under the auspices of the one “sending” him.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.2 The Bestowal of the Name**

That Moses is sent references his authority to something outside of himself, to the one who does the sending.<sup>20</sup> False prophets, on the other hand, are not sent. They must act on their own authority; even their visions are their own.<sup>21</sup> In this context, Moses requests the name (3:14: “They will say to me, ‘What is his name?’ What will I say to them?”). The bestowal of the name with the sending sets Moses as Yahweh’s mediator, even his plenipotentiary, before Israel and before Pharaoh. Due to the revelation of the name, Yahweh will be the referent of all that

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<sup>18</sup> Austel speaks of God “sending men on an official mission as his envoys or representatives.” Hermann J. Austel, “שלח,” *TWOT*, II:928.

<sup>19</sup> Rengstorf, quoting the Rabbis (“the one sent by a man is as the man himself”), notes that “the שליח is as good as the שלח in all that he says and does in execution of his commission.” Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “αποστολος,” *TDNT*, I:415.

<sup>20</sup> As Rengstorf notes, “the emphasis rests on the fact of sending in conjunction with the one who sends, not on the one who is sent.” He further asserts that “the one who is sent is of interest only to the degree that in some measure he embodies in his existence as such the one who sends him.” Rengstorf, “αποστολος,” *TDNT*, I:400-401.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Jeremiah 14:14-15.

Moses says and does toward Israel in the carrying out of his office.<sup>22</sup>

The name Yahweh is the subtext to all that Moses will do according to the **צִוֵּי** mandate (“Bring out my people!”). As Moses speaks and acts, the name Yahweh is unfolded. He is the one who really *is*<sup>23</sup> over against the Egyptians gods who *are not* (i.e., who do not really exist), and the one who “causes to be”<sup>24</sup> over against the Egyptian gods who cannot create precisely because they are themselves only personifications of created things.<sup>25</sup> This God bestows his name and, over against the Egyptian gods who are named by men, this bestowal establishes that the initiative belongs entirely to the one giving his name, Yahweh. As Fretheim notes, “It is God who gives the name; God is not named by others, unlike people or other gods . . . it sets one off from others who have names, including gods.”<sup>26</sup> The bestowal of the name reveals that this God

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<sup>22</sup> As an aside, Luther says this with regard to the connection of the holy Name and that which is done in the Name:

we ought to esteem Baptism . . . because God has commanded it, and, besides, it is performed in His name. For these are the words, Go ye, baptize; however, not in your name, but in the name of God. For to be baptized in the name of God is to be baptized not by men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own work.

Luther, “The Large Catechism,” in *Concordia Triglotta*, 735.

<sup>23</sup> Translating Exodus 3:14’s אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה as “I am he who is.” See E. Schild, “On Exodus iii 14—‘I Am that I Am,’” *Vetus Testamentum* IV, 3 (1954): 302.

<sup>24</sup> Hummel makes a note on reading the Tetragrammaton as causative (Hiphil). Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> Dalman is able to speak of Pharaoh’s defeat and Israel’s Sea crossing as “a polemical event” accomplished to “teach Israel and Egypt about God by refuting myth.” The impotence of Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods was demonstrated as “only Israel was brought across the Field of Reeds into God’s holy dwelling place, and into fellowship with Him.” Roger Wayne Dalman, “The Theology of Israel’s Sea Crossing” (Th.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1990), 11-14, 155-156.

<sup>26</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 64.

who gives his name reveals himself specifically for his purpose of grace. As Young states, “In wondrous grace God reveals His nature to man in so far as it determines what God is for His people.”<sup>27</sup>

By this name, Yahweh has bound himself to Moses; there will be no disconnection between the word of Yahweh and the word spoken by Moses.<sup>28</sup> With Yahweh, the word [דבר] and the doing [עשה] go together; what he speaks, he does.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, there will be no disconnection between the action of Yahweh and the action of Moses. As mentioned above, the action of Yahweh is the delivery of his people (the נצל of 3:8), and that action will be accomplished by Moses (the יצא of 3:10). Word and action are bound together so that when Moses complains that he is “not a man of words [דברים]” (4:10), Yahweh stations Aaron to hear the words from Moses, speak them, and together Moses and Aaron will “do” [עשה] the action

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<sup>27</sup> Young continues, “Thus in the Name the people would have a pledge and earnest of the gracious deliverance which God alone could bring and would bring to them.” Edward J. Young, “The Call of Moses (Part II),” *The Westminster Theological Journal* XXX (November 1967 to May 1968): 21.

<sup>28</sup> Fretheim notes that “God acts in and through the work of Moses . . . God takes the initiative.” But then Fretheim goes on to say that “God *needs* Moses as an instrument in and through whom to work . . . *gifted human leadership in this matter is necessary.*” (Emphasis original.) Fretheim, *Exodus*, 58.

Contrary to Fretheim’s contention, though, it must be noted that God’s giving of his name and his action “in and through the work of Moses,” which action is syndetic to the giving of the Name, is not of necessity, but of grace. It is not predicable according to God’s nature, but is entirely of God’s self-chosen condescension to the people he has chosen. It is gift. (Cf. below, 3.7*b*, notes 95 and 99.) For corresponding note on Yahweh’s נחם, see below, 4.4, note 54.

<sup>29</sup> Isaiah 46:11: “I have spoken [דבר], I will bring it to pass . . . I will do [עשה] it.” (See also, for example, Ezekiel 17:24.) Vollmer notes, “Yahweh says what he does and does what he says.” J. Vollmer, “עשה,” *TLOT*, II:950.

(4:15):

וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים בְּפִיו  
וְאַנְכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ וְעִם־פִּיהוּ  
וְהוֹרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן

trans.: *So you will speak to him [Aaron] and place the words in his mouth.  
Now<sup>30</sup> I am with your mouth and with his mouth,  
and I will teach [both of] you what you are to do.*

Having already promised to be *with* Moses, Yahweh locates himself at the mouths of Moses and Aaron.<sup>31</sup>

The verse gives the distinction between what Moses will speak and do in contrast to what Yahweh will do.<sup>32</sup> Sarna comments that the promise to Moses from Yahweh is, “I will be with you and with him *as* you speak.” (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup> But Yahweh’s presence is more physically specific than that. Yahweh has located himself not just according to the verb of Moses’ speaking, but at the concrete point of Moses’ mouth [עִם־פִּיךָ]. Yahweh is with Moses, and

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<sup>30</sup> Joüon notes that the separation of the ׀ from the verbal form may “indicate a lack of sequence.” Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. T. Muraoka (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), II:580.

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 3:12: פִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ.

<sup>32</sup> When Yahweh promises his presence (“with you”) the usual construction is אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, without the emphasis of the added אֲנִכִּי (e.g., Genesis 26:3; 31:3, Exodus 3:12; Joshua 1:5). More rare is אֲנִכִּי עִמָּךְ, without the verb אֶהְיֶה (e.g., Genesis 28:15).

אֲנִכִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ is found only at Deuteronomy 31:23, where Joshua is ordained to replace Moses. The grammar of Deuteronomy 31:23 parallels the use of אֲנִכִּי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ at Exodus 4:15. In both, the ׀ connected to the final clause’s introductory pronoun (אֲנִכִּי) would indicate not consequence (see Joüon footnote above) but “antithetical contrast,” stressing that while it is Moses and Aaron (or Joshua, in the case of Deuteronomy 31) who will actually speak the words, it will be none other than *Yahweh* present. (See Joüon, II:538-539 and II:581.nb.)

<sup>33</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 22.

Moses is his instrument to speak his words.<sup>34</sup> Fretheim notes that “in some sense the word of God becomes so embodied in Moses that in and through what Moses says (and does!) *God* himself becomes active in that situation.”<sup>35</sup> Although Yahweh has made himself visible only to Moses and not to the people,<sup>36</sup> the people understand that Yahweh himself has “met *with us*.”<sup>37</sup> In this same way, when Israel later stands on the wilderness side of the Jordan, it is the voice of Moses from which Israel hears the words given by Yahweh.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the sons of Israel are to understand they have rebelled against the mouth, the voice, *of Yahweh* (Deuteronomy 9:23-24):

You rebelled against the mouth [פי יהוה] of Yahweh your God.  
 You were not faithful to him, you did not listen to his voice [קלו],  
 you have been rebellious against Yahweh.

“The words” [הדברים] to be placed in the mouth refer back to the bestowal of the name when Yahweh said “*Thus* you will say to the sons of Israel” (Exodus 3:15). In speaking of those he will rescue, Yahweh gives the specificity that they are the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Earlier, after Abraham had already interceded on his behalf, Abimelech gave the recognition that

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<sup>34</sup> Grundmann, noting that *μετα* “is the [LXX] rendering of *עם* and *את*,” observes that when it is used with the genitive, *μετα* “is a declaration by God Himself by which He binds Himself to man.” Walter Grundmann, “*עטס - μετα*,” *TDNT*, VII: 768-769, 774.

As a note, at Exodus 4:15 *μετα* is not used to translate *עם* (it is translated with the verb and *ανα*), but at Exodus 3:12 *עמך יהוה* is rendered as *ἐξομαυ μετα σου*.

<sup>35</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 75.

<sup>36</sup> *נראה*, Exodus 3:16 (also 3:2).

<sup>37</sup> Exodus 3:18, *נִקְרָה עָלֵינוּ*.

<sup>38</sup> Deuteronomy 1:3: “Moses spoke to the sons of Israel according to all which Yahweh had commanded him [כָּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶתֹן].”

recognition that “God is with you [אלהים עמך] in all that you do” (Genesis 21:22).<sup>39</sup>

Subsequently, Yahweh had given the promise of his presence to Isaac: “Dwell in this land and I will be with you [איהיה עמך] and bless you.” In giving the promise, he included the descendants of Isaac (Genesis 26:3), so that when Jacob is afflicted he prays to God to be delivered [נצל] from the hand of Esau, calling upon the promise of the good land and descendants.<sup>40</sup>

In Exodus 3, Yahweh, the God of Jacob, sets forth to deliver the descendants. To achieve this deliverance [נצל], Yahweh has “come down” [ירד (v.8)] to Moses at Horeb, the mountain of God. From this location Yahweh now sends [שלח] Moses to accomplish the rescue of the sons of Jacob. In this way the commission of Moses with the bestowal of the Name, along with all that Moses speaks, will be understood in the eschatological framework stretching back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and extending to all future generations. With Israel now in slavery, the generations are subject to annihilation (as indicated by Pharaoh’s orders to kill the sons). Yahweh’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is in jeopardy; at stake is the eternal Name that is to go to all generations (Exodus 3:15).

In the end, the introduction of a dichotomy between mediation and intercession (as it is mentioned above) would seem to be foreign to the text and unhelpful. While the commissioning of Moses at Exodus 3 clearly establishes him as the one to speak and execute Yahweh's words, and while there may not seem to be the explicitly stated establishment of his role to speak for the people to God, it must at the very least be said that it also does not thereby exclude the act of

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<sup>39</sup> Hamilton comments that Abimelech “affirms the reality of the divine presence with the patriarch.” Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18-50*, 88.

<sup>40</sup> Genesis 32:7, 9-12.



intercession from the prophetic office. More to the point, it would seem to be an artificial constriction of Moses' office, since the commission is to deliver Israel, and the commissioning of Moses to that office is founded upon the bestowal of the Name. According to that name Yahweh will be with Moses, even with his mouth. So the question to bring to the text is, What role, if any, does intercession hold in the prophetic office as seen with Moses?

### **3.3 The Intercession of Moses**

As noted above, פלל is the word attached to Abraham's office of prophet.<sup>41</sup> While usually translated simply with “pray,” פלל has a root meaning of “sit in judgment,” or “arbitrate.” Being used in conjunction with words such as עצה (counsel) and even צדק (righteous), פלל carries a forensic nature.<sup>42</sup> While the Hithpael פלל means “to pray,” it is with a specificity toward the forensic pleading for vindication, toward the intercession on behalf of another.

When the people of Israel (or Aaron himself) are faced with the anger of Yahweh due to their rebellion, they turn to the prophet Moses for intercession:

The people cried out to Moses, so Moses interceded [פלל] to Yahweh and the fire was quenched. (Numbers 11:2)

The people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against Yahweh and against you; intercede [פלל] to Yahweh that He take the serpents from us.” So Moses interceded [פלל] on behalf of the people. (Numbers 21:7)

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<sup>41</sup> See section 2.4.

<sup>42</sup> Ezekiel 16:52 (as noted in section 2.4 above).

Yahweh was very angry with Aaron -- to destroy him, so I interceded [פלל] on behalf of Aaron.... (Deuteronomy 9:20)

Thus I fell down at the face of Yahweh, forty days and forty nights I fell down, because Yahweh had said He would destroy you. Therefore I interceded [פלל] to Yahweh and said, “Lord Yahweh....” (Deuteronomy 9:25-26)

The audience of the prophet's appeal is no less than Yahweh himself. Moses intercedes to Yahweh by name, basing his petition upon the name given at the burning bush when Yahweh promised that he would be with Moses' mouth.<sup>43</sup> In his intercession of Deuteronomy 9, it is specifically to “Lord Yahweh” [ארני יהוה] that Moses intercedes. This brings in the significance already evident in Abraham's petitioning for Sodom and Gomorrah,<sup>44</sup> that Yahweh, while “incarnationally” located by his given name, is the “Judge of all the earth” (who has come down).<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, in addressing Yahweh as ארני, Moses also clearly defines his office with respect to Yahweh. Counterpart to the ארני is the עבד [servant].<sup>46</sup> It is precisely as commissioned servant that Moses petitions יהוה ארני; Moses' petitioning may be seen as proper

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<sup>43</sup> Sarna, in commenting on Exodus 3, mentions the fact that Moses, “in his direct speech, invariably uses the YHVH, not ‘*elohim*, ‘God.’” Sarna, *Exodus*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> At Genesis 15:2,8 also it is specifically יהוה ארני to whom Abram gives petition. Wenham notes that ארני “is a characteristic mode of address to God in intercessory prayer.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Dallas: Word Books, 1987), 327.

<sup>45</sup> Genesis 18:21; Genesis 18:25: הַשֵּׁפֶט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ; Genesis 18:27: ארני.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Genesis 44:18 or Exodus 21:4-5, where ארני and עבד are juxtaposed in reference to an earthly lord and servant.

to his office.<sup>47</sup>

Second, as with the prophet Abraham,<sup>48</sup> Moses intercedes on behalf of another. The prophet, according to his office, stands before Yahweh in the place of another to make an appeal. This latter point, that the prophet's intercession is בער [on behalf of] another, only strengthens the framework of arbitration or mediation for the word פלל, so that the arbitration cannot be taken as just that of a disinterested third party, but rather is a dynamic act of advocacy.

There are other clear instances of Moses interceding with God for Israel than just those instances which use the word *intercede* [פלל].<sup>49</sup> The text of Deuteronomy 9:16-29, which uses פלל, is a recounting by Moses of the “golden calf” incident of Exodus 32:9-35. The parallel text in Exodus does not use the word פלל, but it is instructive for the other descriptions it uses to

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<sup>47</sup> Craigie notes that in Deuteronomy, יהוה ארני “is used only in the introduction to prayer and may indicate the relationship between Moses and God on which the petition was based, namely the recognition of God’s Lordship and sovereign power.” Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 197.

Cf. Weinfeld, who comments on the יהוה ארני address at Deuteronomy 3:24: “This form of address expresses a personal relationship with God, hence it is characteristic of prayers.” Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 191.

<sup>48</sup> See 2.2 above.

<sup>49</sup> The list of the intercessions of Moses, in addition to those that include פלל (which four citations are listed above), usually includes Exodus 8:8-14; 8:28-32; 9:27-29; 10:16-17; 32:11-14; 32:30-36; 33:12-17; 34:8-9; Numbers 11:11-15; 12:13-14; 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 10:10. (E.g., Muilenburg, “The Intercession of The Covenant Mediator”: 167. H.H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 163. Nils Johansson, *PARAKLETOI: Vorstellungen von Fürsprechern für die Menschen vor Gott in der Alttestamentlichen Religion, im Spätjudentum und Urchristentum* (Lund: Gleerupska, 1940): 5-10.

depict the act of the prophet's intercession:

Then Moses *entreated*<sup>50</sup> [חלה] before Yahweh his God, and said . . . (32:11)

Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. So now I will go up to Yahweh; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then Moses returned to Yahweh and said . . . (32:30-31)

The word translated as *pleaded* [חלה] is given a meaning by Holladay of “appease,” “flatter,” or “put [God] in a gentle mood.”<sup>51</sup> At I Kings 13:6 the usage of חלה (plead/entreat) is helpful; for there it is a “man of God”—subsequently identified as a prophet (v.18)—who is asked by the king to entreat God on the king’s behalf:

Then the king answered and said to the man of God, “Please entreat the favor of Yahweh your God, and intercede for me.”

And חלה (plead/entreat), in the Piel, is used in parallel with פלל (intercede).<sup>52</sup> This usage of *plead* is common for the prophets before Yahweh. For example, Jeremiah “pleads before Yahweh” (Jeremiah 26:19), and the result of the prophetic pleading is that Yahweh “repents concerning the evil which He had spoken against them.”

Returning to the use of חלה at Exodus 32 (32:11; 30-31), the word is used in conjunction with some other significant terms:

- a. “. . . before Yahweh his God” (lit., to the face of Yahweh [אח־פני יהוה])

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<sup>50</sup> The translation in NKJV: pleaded. NASB: entreated.

<sup>51</sup> The latter meaning is given with reference to 1 Kings 13:6. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 104. See also, Bright, *Jeremiah*, 170.

<sup>52</sup> This is not a unique usage. See note below where the words are grouped together, for example, when King Manasseh approaches Yahweh in II Chronicles 33:12-13: Manasseh “entreats to the face of Yahweh his God,” and he “intercedes to Him,” and Yahweh, upon hearing Manasseh’s supplication, then “brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom.”

- b. “. . . go up to Yahweh”
- c. “Moses returned to Yahweh . . .”

The combination of חלה (plead/entreat) with the “face of Yahweh” is a common one, carrying with it a “ceremonial reference.”<sup>53</sup> It is rooted in the “ceremonial of the court,” where the seeing of “the face of a king is to be admitted to audience.”<sup>54</sup> In Exodus 32 the term has its immediate reference at Yahweh’s presence<sup>55</sup> on the mountain; but it also has a reference within the complete framework of the prophet pleading his case as he stands in the council of Yahweh and his heavenly hosts.<sup>56</sup> In the Old Testament, the subject of the “pleading before the face” is never Yahweh; he is the object, while the subject is he who is the “official representative” of the people of Yahweh.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> K.Seybold, “חלה,” *TDOT*, IV:407.

<sup>54</sup> Eduard Lohse, “προσωπον,” *TDNT*, VI:771.

<sup>55</sup> Hamilton writes that the phrase “to see God’s face” probably has “the technical sense of visiting the sanctuary for cultic worship.” Victor P. Hamilton, “פנימ,” *TWOT*, II:727.

<sup>56</sup> As a note, the book of Job suggests the word’s usage in the context of the council. In Job 19:19, Job speaks of the earthly council surrounding him, complaining, “all those of my council [סוד] detest me.” Then at 29:21, Job grumbles, “men listened to me and waited, and kept silent for my counsel [עצה].” At 11:19, Job’s friend holds out the supposed reward of following his counsel: “. . . and many would entreat your face.” Here, the expression “entreat your face” suggests a setting in the same context as the other references to those who are surrounding Job in his own “court” [סוד and, derivatively, עצה]. The construction: וחלו פניך.

Compare also Proverbs 19:6 and especially Psalm 13 where David pleads (v.1, MT 2), “How long, Yahweh . . . will you hide your face [פניך] from me,” and then he continues (v.2, MT 3) with the contrast, “. . . shall I set counsel [עצה] in myself?”

<sup>57</sup> Seybold, “חלה,” *TDOT*, IV:408.

To be “at Yahweh's face” is to be located at the temple where sacrifice is given.<sup>58</sup> As Lohse says, “believers seek the face of the Lord and find it when they attend the temple.”<sup>59</sup> And the temple is more than just representational of “Yahweh's face”; it is the heavenly council made visible, “the familiar locus of theophany and judgment throughout prophecy.”<sup>60</sup> (This is finally given in its full context in Hebrews 9:24 as Christ enters the holy place of heaven itself to appear before the face of God,<sup>61</sup> “where the expression the Old Testament used for visiting the temple is transferred to the heavenly sanctuary.”<sup>62</sup>)

Finally, when Moses “pleads before the face of Yahweh” (32:11), it is followed with his address to the Israelites in verses 30-31:

You have sinned a great sin. So now I will go up to Yahweh; perhaps I can make atonement . . . Then Moses returned to Yahweh and said . . .

The usage of “go up” underscores the transactive nature of the prophetic office: Moses comes down the mountain to speak as Yahweh’s voice to the Israelites; Moses goes up the mountain to speak as Israel’s voice to Yahweh.

In this particular instance, Moses descends only to find Israel in rejection of Yahweh’s

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<sup>58</sup> Stolz speaks of “plead before the face of Yahweh” as “a technical cultic term.” F. Stolz, “חלה,” *TLOT*, I:427.

<sup>59</sup> Lohse, “προσωπον,” *TDNT*, VI:773.

<sup>60</sup> Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 384.

<sup>61</sup> Hebrews 9:24 speaks of Christ entering heaven “to become visible before the face of God [ἐμφανισθῆναι τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ].” Although its usage is less than uniform, the LXX uses πρόσωπόν for פני -- for example, Psalm 27:8 (LXX 26:8), Zech. 8:21, and Numbers 6:26 -- which indicates a usage whereby the word is “employed cultically.” See also, Lohse, “πρόσωπόν,” *TDNT*, VI:773.

<sup>62</sup> Lohse, “προσωπον,” *TDNT*, VI:777.

counsel as given in the commandments<sup>63</sup> (Exodus 20:1ff.), whereupon Moses first speaks Yahweh's condemnation to Israel, then ascends the mountain and speaks Israel's appeal to Yahweh. Brevard S. Childs notes, "The contrast here is between Moses' intercession for the people when he is with God and his judgment of the people when he faces them in the valley."<sup>64</sup> The emphasis of Moses' going up, returning from below with the people, serves to underscore the focus of Moses making his entreaty before the face of Yahweh. According to his office, he had authoritatively spoken Yahweh's words to Israel; now, as her official representative, he authoritatively pleads for Israel before the face of Yahweh.

The verb of *make supplication* [עָתַר], as is the case with *entreat*, is never performed by Yahweh; Yahweh is always the object who receives the act of supplication. עָתַר is found only twenty times in Scripture; of these, almost half have as their subject Moses.<sup>65</sup> Although the scriptural evidence is sparse, עָתַר is used in parallel construction with both פָּלַל and חָלָה at 2 Chronicles 33:12b-13a:

he made entreaty [חָלָה] before the face of Yahweh . . .  
and he interceded [פָּלַל] to Him,  
So he [Yahweh] received his supplication [עָתַר].

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<sup>63</sup> A correlation is suggested here between Yahweh's commandments or words and the counsel that proceeds from His council. Proverbs 1:23, 25 gives reference to "Wisdom's" words ("I will make known my words [דְּבַר] to you") and to counsel ("because you have disdained my counsel [עֲצָה]"). Psalm 119 speaks of rebuke for those "who stray from Your commandments [מִצְוָה]" (v.21); then speaks of Yahweh's testimonies which are "my counselors [עֲצָה]" (v.24).

<sup>64</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 563.

<sup>65</sup> Ex. 8:8 [MT 4], 9 [5], 28 [24], 29 [25], 30 [26]; 9:28; 10:17, 18.

The noun form עֹתֵר is usually rendered as suppliant or worshiper,<sup>66</sup> indicating a cultic context for עֹתֵר.<sup>67</sup> Returning to the case of Moses, Pharaoh's request to Moses after the fourth plague is

I will let you go, that you may *sacrifice* [זָבַח] to Yahweh your God in the wilderness . . . *make supplication* [עֹתֵר] on behalf [בְּעַד] of me. (Exodus 8:28-32 [MT 24-28])

Likewise, following the second plague Pharaoh had pled with Moses,

“*Make supplication* [עֹתֵר] to Yahweh for me . . . and I will let the people go that they may *sacrifice* [זָבַח] to Yahweh.” And Moses said, “The honor is yours to tell me when I shall *make supplication* [עֹתֵר] for you.” (Exodus 8:8-13 [MT 4-9])

The prophet Isaiah also uses עֹתֵר with a cultic framework when delivering prophecy concerning

Egypt:

The Egyptians will know Yahweh in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering . . . and Yahweh will strike Egypt, he will strike it and heal; they will return to Yahweh, and he will *be entreated* [עֹתֵר] by them . . . Yahweh of hosts shall bless, saying, “Blessed is Egypt.” (Isaiah 19:21-25)

While sometimes translated as “to pray,” עֹתֵר may be understood more concretely from the perspective of the sacrifice which is done before the face of Yahweh.<sup>68</sup> Von Rad even

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<sup>66</sup> *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 801.

<sup>67</sup> While not determinative, Hermann notes that the origin for עֹתֵר (Aramaic) “attests the sense of ‘sacrifice.’” Johannes Hermann, “εἰσπραξία,” *TDNT*, II:785.

<sup>68</sup> Ap-Thomas holds that for עֹתֵר, “the meaning ‘kill for sacrifice’ has receded wholly into the background in the Old Testament, and the meaning ‘entreat’ has so dominated the other that, though it is possible that sacrifice was still an accompaniment to this particular type of entreaty it is never actually mentioned in connexion therewith.” D.R. Ap-Thomas, “Notes on Some Terms Relating to Prayer”: 241.

Nevertheless, Exodus and Isaiah (as cited above) do give עֹתֵר alongside “sacrifice” [זָבַח] (Exodus 8:8-13 [MT 4-9]); זָבַח and מִנְחָה (Isaiah 19:21).



suggests rendering the verb as “to request by means of sacrifice.”<sup>69</sup> As it bears upon the prophetic office, עֲתָר places the prophet in the framework of the cult, with the prophet representing the assembly of Israel as he makes supplication before the assembly of heaven, at the face of Yahweh. Here is found the significance of understanding the supplication in its cultic framework. For the prophet is representing the assembly of Israel with respect to the assembly or council in heaven. There is a transaction between the two that finds its accomplishment in the prophetic office; specifically, in the pleading presented by the prophet.<sup>70</sup> Because the point of the dispute is the unholiness of Israel over against the holiness of Yahweh, the resolution will be understood only in the context of the cult, the location of the sacrifice atoning for sins. So before the heavenly council, these two go together (though not necessarily temporally): the action of the priestly sacrifice to atone for sins, and the words, the supplication [עֲתָר], of the prophet to plead the case for the sinful nation.

The prophet Moses goes before the face of Yahweh and pleads for the sinner. In so doing, Moses is inextricably bound to the sinful people; the prophet is identified with these

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<sup>69</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I: 380.

See also Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of The Old Testament*, trans. J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), I:172: “Sacrifice and prayer go extremely close together . . . עֲתָר [was] originally a technical term for sacrificial language.”

In disagreement, Hermann states that “עֲתָר never suggests ‘to sacrifice’ and is never connected with sacrifices.” Johannes Hermann, “εὐχομαι,” *TDNT*, II:785. Nevertheless, Hermann does not address such passages as Zephaniah 3:10, nor the passages from Exodus mentioned above.

<sup>70</sup> Incidentally, this “transaction” or relationship is indicated also— in the negative— at Psalm 2 where the kings of the earth “establish themselves” and “take counsel together” against Yahweh who “sits in the heavens.” The earthly council sets itself against Yahweh’s “Anointed One” (v.2).

people for whom he makes entreaty before the face of Yahweh (Exodus 32:32):

Then Moses returned to Yahweh and said, “. . . Yet now, if You will forgive their sin but if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written.”

In his prophetic office, Moses will allow no disconnection between himself and the people of Israel. If Yahweh will not forgive Israel’s sin, Moses would have his name blotted from the book. After receiving the second set of stone tablets, in response to Yahweh's proclamation of mercy, Moses

made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. Then he said, “If now I have found grace in your eyes, Lord, let my Lord, please, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.” (Exodus 34:8-9)

There is an unmistakable emphasis found in Moses’ placing himself in the first person among Israel. In chapter 32, speaking Yahweh's words to the people, Moses says,

You have sinned a great sin, so now I will go up to Yahweh . . .

Furthermore, when Yahweh first spoke wrathfully to Moses about Israel's sin, he said,

I have seen this people . . . a stiff-necked people . . . let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation. (Exodus 32:9-10, NKJV)

The prophet does not allow this disconnection between the prophet and his people to stand. The prophet intercedes not for himself but on behalf [בער] of another. As with Moses’ intercession to Yahweh at 34:8-9, the stress on the identity of the prophet with the nation is such that he can pray *as* the nation. The prophet acts vicariously on behalf of the people. As Rhodes notes about Jeremiah, the prophet “so identifies with his people that he prays vicariously:

‘Correct me, Yahweh, in justice; not in anger, lest you bring me to naught.’<sup>71</sup>

Because there is no disconnection between the prophet and the people, and because there is no disconnection between the prophet and Yahweh, there will be no separation between Yahweh and the people. But since Israel has separated herself from Yahweh by her sin, the prophet prays for Israel’s forgiveness. He pleads for her restoration as Yahweh’s holy people (“take us as your inheritance,” Exodus 34:9). He intercedes to Yahweh, before His face, in His council. The intercession is heard and Yahweh responds.

The language used to describe the prophet Moses’ interceding to Yahweh is not left at an intangible point of prayer given in the abstract. The prayer is located with respect to speaker, hearer, and beneficiary. A survey of the verbs applied to the prophet Moses reveals

Moses intercedes or arbitrates;

he intercedes before the face of Yahweh;

he mediates on behalf of Israel;

he goes up to deliver the people's plea of entreaty;

and he worships and makes supplication for the people as for himself.

In surveying the verbs used to describe Moses' action of intercession, it is evident that Moses’ office has a formal aspect connected to his identification with the people of Israel before Yahweh and to his access to Yahweh and the heavenly council.

The prophet’s intercession is not just some general activity in which a particular prophet

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<sup>71</sup> Rhodes, “Israel's Prophets as Intercessors”: 119. Rhodes is commenting on Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 [MT 8:18-23].

This vicarious identification is so remarkable (even scandalous?) that, as Rhodes makes further note, “The LXX and VT translators substituted us for me.”

might at times find himself engaged irrespective of his office, but rather is an identifiable authoritative action grounded in his office of contending and mediating for the people. The office finds its provenance in the bestowal of the Name and the corollary mandate to Moses to accomplish Yahweh's work of bringing Israel into the good land. This prophetic intercession will always be in service of Yahweh's ultimate purpose, the deliverance of his people. The prayer is tangible as the prophet stands before the face of Yahweh in the office that Yahweh has bestowed upon him—the arbitrator, the mediator, for Israel. He intercedes for them, then he returns to Israel from the face of Yahweh, and he speaks that counsel which Yahweh has revealed to him.

Yahweh's requital revealed by the mouth of his prophet is the message of good news. (It can be a harsh message for an unrepentant people—i.e., it is both condemnation and acquittal, but always toward the accomplishment of Israel's deliverance.) In response to hearing the plea of Israel as that plea is embodied in the intercession of the prophet's mouth, Yahweh reverses himself, he repents!<sup>72</sup>

So Yahweh repented from the evil which He said He would do to His people.  
And Moses turned and went down from the mountain . . . (Exodus 32:14-15).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The divine repentance is “a result of prophetic intercession,” according to Andersen and Freedman. They also note this episode of Moses interceding as “a model for prophecy and history writing in Israel . . . [which] helped to define the role of prophet as mediator between God and his people.” Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, The Anchor Bible, v. 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 674-676.

Cf. section 4.4, where Yahweh's repentance is examined in light of his immutability. (See also below, note 85 of section 3.8.)

<sup>73</sup> This same repentance, in response to the prophet's mediation, is found also, for example, with Amos, about which see the following chapter.

This repentance is real and is achieved by the prophet's interceding.<sup>74</sup> Just as the intercession for the people is not left in abstraction but is embodied in the words of entreaty delivered to Yahweh by the prophet, so also Yahweh's declaration of His grace, which issues from His council, is not left in abstraction. It is revealed to Israel—Yahweh's declaration is embodied, incarnationally delivered to Israel, by the mouth of his prophet.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

What role, if any, does intercession hold in the prophetic office as seen with Moses? Yahweh, having determined to deliver [נצל] his people Israel, sets forth [שלח] Moses to accomplish the task.<sup>75</sup> Moses discharges an office as one sent. His legitimacy to speak and act is not intrinsic to himself but is found in the bestowal of the Name. For this reason, Moses' words and actions toward the accomplishment of delivering Israel will be authoritative. The words and actions are referenced not to Moses but to the Name.<sup>76</sup> Because Yahweh had given the promise by oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that their descendants would dwell in the good land, the Name that is to go to all generations is at stake when the descendants are at stake—the sons of Israel must be delivered. In setting forth Moses to bring about this deliverance, Yahweh binds himself to Moses and to his mouth.<sup>77</sup>

The deliverance of Israel will be complete. She will not be rescued from Pharaoh only to

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<sup>74</sup> See following chapter on Amos.

<sup>75</sup> See above, 3.1.

<sup>76</sup> See above, 3.2.

<sup>77</sup> Ex. 3:12, 4:15. See above, 3.2.

die at the hand of Yahweh; that would still give the net result of the Name abandoned. Due to her own evil, Israel is imperiled by the threat coming from holy Yahweh just as surely as she had earlier been imperiled by evil Pharaoh. Even as Moses spoke words to Pharaoh, and those words are understood in the framework of his office as Israel's deliverer, so now he speaks words to Israel in the stead of her Lord, and to Yahweh in the stead of Israel.

Moses intercedes [פלל, חלה, עחר], pleading Israel's case. Made at the face of Yahweh, it is the appeal for delivery from judgment, for Yahweh to repent of his verdict, so that the appeal is syndetic to the sacrifice atoning for sins.<sup>78</sup> If the appeal is made but in the end is not successful, then Moses' office is insufficient and Yahweh's name is not upheld.<sup>79</sup> Even the enticement of having a great nation made out of him at the expense of Israel's survival will not pull Moses from his appointment.<sup>80</sup> For the toleration of the destruction of Israel would be the demission of his office. And Moses has been set to act not on his own but according to divine authority.

Returning to the aforementioned distinction between prophet as "mediator" and

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<sup>78</sup> See above, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5.

<sup>79</sup> As Fretheim puts it, the salvation of Israel "is a matter of God being true to self," that is, being true to that "which God has personally sworn." He also notes that "if God were to destroy this people, would not that place the divine purpose with respect to non-Israelite peoples, indeed God's very name, in some jeopardy?" Fretheim, *Exodus*, 285-286.

<sup>80</sup> When Yahweh proposes to "make a nation" of Moses (Exodus 32:10), Moses appeals to the promise given to "Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants to whom you swore by yourself." (32:13) As Rhodes notes, "From Moses' perspective, to be a new Abraham would not be the fulfillment of the promise." Rhodes, "Israel's Prophets as Intercessors": 113.

Indeed, as McBride notes, "the duty of bearing 'the burden of all this people' in their wayward recalcitrance belongs to the Mosaic office." S. Dean McBride, Jr., "Transcendent Authority, The Role of Moses in Old Testament Traditions," *Interpretation*, 237.

“intercessor,”<sup>81</sup> the irrelevance of the distinction may now be more clearly stated. As Craigie describes Moses, he “was not simply the ‘microphone’ of God, but was a man with responsibility; he was responsible under God for the faithful presentation of the divine words, and he was responsible for the people whom God had committed to his charge.”<sup>82</sup> Moses’ intercession for Israel over against Yahweh may be understood as consequent, even necessary, to the accomplishment of his mandate from Yahweh to deliver Israel, as necessary as was his mediating for Israel over against Pharaoh. It all falls under Yahweh’s stated determination<sup>83</sup> that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be his for all generations.

The point of understanding Moses *as* prophet is not to subsume Moses under this classification. In this way, what is known of later prophets would be read back into Moses, controlling what will be assumed or allowed of the Mosaic office. The direction is rather the opposite. As Hummel puts it, “Moses is *the* prophet *par excellence* because of his unique role as representative and mediator of the primary, Sinai revelation.”<sup>84</sup> Other prophets will be understood in the light of Moses not because they will fulfill the same functions given specifically to Moses (the actual deliverance from Egypt, the march to the promised land, etc.), but because they will call Israel back to the Sinai covenant. They will prophesy in the name

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<sup>81</sup> Again, “mediator” would here mean one who speaks only for God (but not for the people to God, i.e., intercession). See above, 3.1.

<sup>82</sup> Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 39.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, Genesis 15:1-7; 17:1-8; 26:23-25; Ex. 3:15.

<sup>84</sup> Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 171. Cf. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 38-39.

given to Moses at the burning bush,<sup>85</sup> and like Moses they will speak not their own words but the word of God. They “would therefore be heard and obeyed.”<sup>86</sup>

So the point of understanding Moses as prophet is helpful precisely at the point of the Name given by which the prophet is to speak and act.<sup>87</sup> For by bestowing his name holy Yahweh has come down to sinful Israel and made himself approachable.<sup>88</sup> He is accessible to the sinner

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<sup>85</sup> See Childs, *Exodus*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 262. Craigie comments on Deuteronomy 18:15: “a prophet like me, from your midst, from your brothers—the primary sense in which the coming prophets would resemble Moses would be in their function, which was to declare the word of God.”

<sup>87</sup> See above, 3.2.

<sup>88</sup> God’s condescension and approachability, though, are not correctly comprehended with Fretheim’s concept of “divine helplessness.” According to Fretheim, it is “clear that the OT understands God’s power as limited, in some ways, in order for God to be consistent with the way in which God has chosen to relate to the world . . . [setting] certain limits regarding divine possibilities.” Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 76-77.

God is not so easily delimited. Having condescended, God is accessible in history according to His revealed name, but this does not mean he is subject *to* history (Fretheim speaks of Yahweh’s “uncertain future,” p. 78). Nor is Yahweh subject to man’s actions, strengths, or weaknesses (Fretheim speaks of “a mutual sharing of creative powers,” p. 74). The problem in Fretheim’s approach is the danger of, as Raabe puts it, “delving into the mysteries of the ‘hidden God’ on the basis of human reason.” Against this danger the corrective is found in “not trying to penetrate the inscrutable mysteries of God, and by adhering to His revealed Word to which He points us.” Paul Raabe, review of *The Suffering of God*, by Fretheim, *Concordia Journal* 12:4 (July 1986): 147-152.

It will not work to take what is given to be known of Yahweh according to the revelation of his name, according to his  $\text{רַחֵם}$ , and read this back into his nature as if his power or abilities (“possibilities,” Fretheim, p. 77ff.) can thus be restricted. Finally, the mystery, the hiddenness, of Yahweh’s working is that when Yahweh acts in a way, through a thing, which in history can only be perceived as weak (that is, when he acts instrumentally, incarnationally; for example, Amos over against Amaziah), it is at that precise point that his power, concealed, is disclosed. What human eyes perceive as strong is in reality weak, and that which is perceived as weak is in reality strong. In the end, the exertion of earthly “strength” and “ability” (or reason) over against Yahweh’s incarnational disclosure (weak though it may appear) is, in heaven, laughable: Psalm 2. (Cf. below, note 99, and 4.4, note 54.)



for the purpose of the sinner's forgiveness and restoration. Yahweh condescends in such a way that he stands vulnerable, setting himself as one who suffers *with* Israel. As Fretheim puts it, "For God to give the name is to open himself up to hurt."<sup>89</sup>

As prophet, Abraham was vulnerable before Abimelech in order to appeal to Yahweh for Abimelech.<sup>90</sup> Now Moses, as the one sent forth with the authority of the Name, is stationed before Israel authorized to make their vicarious appeal to Yahweh. But he stands unmistakably in weakness. In ordaining Moses, Yahweh chooses one who has placed himself in a position of utter vulnerability. Moses made himself vulnerable to the Egyptians by killing one of their own. He stands vulnerable with regard to the Israelites, as is demonstrated by the Israelite's challenge, "Who set you as prince and judge over us? Will you kill me as you killed the Egyptian."<sup>91</sup>

(Exodus 2:11-14)

Any attempt to peg Moses' office to his own strength or abilities is ruled out.<sup>92</sup> Moses is

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<sup>89</sup> Fretheim states:

Naming also entails vulnerability. In becoming available to the world, God is to some degree at the disposal of those who can name the name. God's name may be misused and abused as well as honored. For God to give the name is to open himself up to hurt. Naming entails the likelihood of divine suffering, and so this act of name-giving is decisively continuous with 3:7: "I know their sufferings."

Fretheim, *Exodus*, 65.

<sup>90</sup> See above, 2.3.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Childs, *Exodus*, 45.

<sup>92</sup> Fretheim, for instance, looks at the relative strengths and weakness of Moses, remarking that "God has discerned that Moses has genuine gifts for leadership, and hence God has chosen him." But if that were the case, then Moses' appeal that he cannot speak well would be properly grounded. For Moses, too, would be arguing with regard to the abilities (or lack thereof) of *Moses*. Fretheim, addressing Moses' appeal, states, "Moses also has a speech impediment, but God will be *able* to work through him in spite of this difficulty" (emphasis added). It should be noted that Fretheim does follow this up by pointing to "God's ways of choosing what is weak in

deliverer of Israel because Yahweh has sent him. As deliverer of Israel, Moses is the one to intercede for her that she will live. When Israel's deliverance must be from the wrath of Yahweh himself, Moses then carries out his office by pleading to Yahweh. Yahweh listens to this plea for deliverance precisely because Yahweh himself has established this order of things for the benefit of his people.

That in interceding Moses does so only in utter vulnerability before Israel attests to the fact that it is Yahweh who is saving his people. As Durham notes, "What Moses and Aaron are to say and how they are to say it, in the accomplishment of Yahweh's purpose, will be to Yahweh's credit, not theirs."<sup>93</sup> It also attests to Moses' identity with Israel, anticipating his death on account of Israel (Deuteronomy 1:37), so that Moses' vulnerability and suffering are understood as being for the sake of Israel.<sup>94</sup> Clearly Moses' vulnerability bears witness most profoundly to Yahweh's gracious condescension to his sinful people. Yahweh suffers with his people.

As with Abraham, Yahweh listens to the one he has stationed to speak for the sinner.

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the world to shame the strong." (See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 72.) But shouldn't this suggest that God is *able* to use Moses, so that the tertiary question is not, What is God's ability? but, What is God's choosing? And that question will be answered by the location of the holy Name. (See above, note 88.)

<sup>93</sup> Durham, *Exodus*, 50. Cf. Fretheim: "The role of the intercessor is seen to be a key to preserving the community from annihilation, but finally the future of Israel is seen to rest solely in God, who is gracious." Fretheim, *Exodus*, 280.

<sup>94</sup> Hummel makes reference to "Moses' substitutionary death (in a sense)," to his "*vicarious* suffering for the sins of the people." Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 98, 190.

Cf. Craigie: "Although Moses was personally without blame for the failures of the Israelites at Kadesh-barnea, his identification with the people as their leader meant that he also accepted with them the result of their failure." Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 105.

Even as Abimelech would not have lived apart from the intercession of Abraham, so Israel will not live, will not be delivered, apart from the intercession of Moses. Because Yahweh hears the intercession of Moses, the petition spoken on earth is heard in heaven. Since the intercession is according to the order ordained by Yahweh himself, Yahweh responds. The response of Yahweh is that deliverance for Israel is decreed in heaven, sins are forgiven.<sup>95</sup> Because Moses is placed as Yahweh's spokesman *to* Israel, the decree of deliverance and forgiveness is heard on earth in Israel from the mouth of the prophet.

Moses is the point at which what is spoken on earth is spoken in heaven; that spoken in heaven on earth. Because Moses is a real man, an actual mouth, the deliberations cannot be taken in the abstract. They cannot be "spiritualized" or reified merely *as if* they had a concrete reality. The conversation is real; as Fretheim notes, it is a "genuine dialogue with chosen leaders."<sup>96</sup> And it is incarnationally<sup>97</sup> accomplished and delivered, brought down into the midst of Israel, at the located delivery point of Moses.<sup>98</sup>

For succeeding prophets, Moses stands as "normative."<sup>99</sup> Henceforth, prophets will be understood with reference to Moses and the Sinai covenant. The deliverance from Egypt,

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<sup>95</sup> Regarding the connection of "Israel delivered" and "sins forgiven," see below, 4.2.

<sup>96</sup> Fretheim, *Exodus*, 291.

<sup>97</sup> The word *incarnationally* is used to speak of Yahweh's way of working in the world, in human history, so that his working is physically seen, heard, comprehended, by those to whom he presents himself.

<sup>98</sup> As Fretheim puts it, "The divine holiness is of such a character that it invites rather than repels human response, inviting Moses into genuine conversation. God does not demand a self-effacing Moses but draws him out and works with him, 'warts and all.'" Fretheim, *Exodus*, 52.

<sup>99</sup> See Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 38.

Yahweh's accomplishment by the agency of his prophet, will be seen as foundational to the preservation of Israel throughout the generations, which preservation becomes dependant upon the prophets who follow. With the promise "I will raise up . . . a prophet like [Moses] and I will give my words into his mouth" (Deuteronomy 18:15), is "the institution of [the] continued line of prophets . . ." <sup>100</sup> These prophets, as was Moses (and Abraham before), will be set forth to beckon Israel back to the Name, and to petition Yahweh to deliver his people according to his name.

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<sup>100</sup> Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 262.

Keil and Delitzsch speak of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 as verses in which "Moses promises the sending of prophets." (Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 393). In this vein, the current thesis treats this promise as a prophecy of the Messiah Jesus. The promise typologically sets forth the prophetic office and the continued prophetic lineage that finally finds its fulfillment and completion in the Prophet Jesus. (See also below, 5.2, footnote 32.)

## CHAPTER 4

### AMOS'S INTERCESSION

#### 4.1 Amos's Prophetic Office

With the words “I am not a prophet,” Amos defends himself against Amaziah’s accusation (Amos 7:14):

וַיַּעַן עָמוֹס וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אֲמִצִּיָּה  
לֹא-נָבִיא אֲנִי  
וְלֹא בֶן-נָבִיא אֲנִי

trans.: *Then Amos answered and said to Amaziah,  
“I am not a prophet,  
and I am not the son of a prophet.”*

Before examining what Amos does as prophet, the question is, Is Amos a prophet? If Amos is indeed a prophet, then what is to be made of his apparent denial: **לֹא נָבִיא אֲנִי**?

The question receives various answers. Some commentators note that it is possible to take **לֹא נָבִיא אֲנִי** in the past tense, rendering a general argument along these lines: “I *was* not a prophet before, [but now I am] . . . for Yahweh took me and has now made me a prophet.”<sup>1</sup> But this falls short of being definitive. As Mays notes, “the problem of tense is not soluble by grammatical analysis,” and further, “it is hypothetically possible for the nominal sentence to refer to the present in contrast to following inflected verbs.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the past tense rendering introduces its own confusion. As Paul comments, “If Amos declares that he formerly

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see James Luther Mays, *Amos*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 137-138. Also, Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 462-463.

<sup>2</sup> Mays, *Amos*, 137.

was not a prophet but now is one, does it not follow that he is also admitting that as he was formerly not a 'son of a prophet,' he now is one?"<sup>3</sup> However, the latter position would be at odds with Amos' claim that he is a herdsman and a tender of sycamore trees.

Simon Cohen comes at the question by saying it is only necessary "to ignore the masoretic punctuation of this verse and to break the opening words of the reply of Amos into two phrases," rendering,

"No!

"I am indeed a Navi (prophet), but not a Ben Navi (professional prophet)."<sup>4</sup>

But of the two parallel nominal  $\text{נָבִי}$  clauses, Cohen somewhat awkwardly proposes to treat them oppositely, the first as a positive assertion ("No! But I am indeed a Navi"), the second as a negative ("But not a Ben Navi").<sup>5</sup>

Andersen and Freedman's tack is to take the words as they stand, but irrespective to the immediate context, which is Amaziah's contention against Amos, not to mention the greater context of Amos's entire prophetic accomplishment. They contend that Amos does indeed "deny that he is a *nabi* but insists on acting like one, by prophesying."<sup>6</sup> This view that detaches

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<sup>3</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Amos*, Hermenia Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 246.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Cohen, "Amos was a Navi," *Hebrew Union College Annual XXXII* (1961): 177. Also see Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 376.

<sup>5</sup> Paul observes that "the following two affirmative statements identifying Amos's secular profession . . . are obviously presented as a contrast to his double denial..." making the further comment that Cohen's proposal would conflict with the usage of the same phrase at Zechariah 13:5. Paul gives a good survey of Cohen's attempt and of other "inventive and ingenious" proposals to explain the seeming contradiction. Paul, *Amos*, 243-246.

<sup>6</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 770.

the functions of the prophetic office from the office itself is quite artificial. It may be noted in passing that Andersen and Freedman speak of Amos as being “under inescapable obligation to deliver the prophetic word to Israel.” They arrive at this conclusion because, in their words, these verses (7:14-15) are “Amos’s *apologia*, and it is a succinct account of what we can only identify as his call.”<sup>7</sup> But if this constitutes his call, his call into *what*, if not the prophetic office?

Amos’s “לא נביא אנכי” is not simply a propositional statement put forth in a vacuum; it stands within its defining context.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, one first considers what it is to which Amos is responding, the proximate cause of the לא נביא.

Amaziah had just spoken of Amos as seer (7:12):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲמַצְיָה אֶל-עָמוֹס חֲזוּהָ לְךָ בְּרַח-לְךָ  
אֶל-אֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה וְאָכַל-שֵׁם לֶחֶם וְשָׁם תִּנְבֵּא:

trans.: *Then Amaziah said to Amos, You seer, Go. Flee away for yourself to the land of Judah and there eat bread, and there prophesy.*

By using “seer” [חזוה], is Amaziah denominating Amos as other than, or less than, a prophet?<sup>9</sup>

Or are the two titles employed synonymously? חזוה can be taken as simply referring to the

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<sup>7</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 775-776.

<sup>8</sup> Hasel, surveying contemporary attempts at resolution, mentions that “the interpretation of verse 14a should be consistent with what is said of both prophets and prophesying in the other parts of the Book of Amos and the eighth-century prophetic writings.” Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Book of Amos* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 46.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen contends that חזוה, “forecaster, seer,” is “obviously a lesser title [than נביא]”; but giving no supporting data, he bases this upon his own thesis with regard to Amos’s argument of chapter 7. Simon Cohen, “Amos was a Nabi”: 177.

immediately preceding visions, but Amos does not actually use the word vision [חזון] there. He says, rather, “The Lord Yahweh *made visible* [ראה] to me . . .” (7:1,4,7). Yet, especially since the Book of Amos opens with “the words of Amos . . . which he envisioned [חזה],” Amaziah’s title of *seer* could, at this point, be taken as a straightforward acknowledgment that Amos is a prophet, a bearer of the word of Yahweh.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, *seer* [חזה] can be used as a disparaging title as when Micah uses it alongside קסם [diviners] in speaking of those who will get “no answer from God.” But Micah uses both חזה and קסם in qualifying some certain prophets [נביא] (3:5-7). The crucial distinction pertaining to חזה and נביא may be found not in whether or not a man is a חזה or a נביא, but in *whose* prophet or seer he is. Is he Yahweh’s, the king’s, or his own? Accordingly, the appropriate diagnostic question to be applied to a particular prophet will not be, Is the man a prophet (or seer)?, but, Does this particular prophet (or seer) have a word not of himself, but of Yahweh?<sup>11</sup> The prophet *of* Yahweh is the prophet having been given the words of Yahweh.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Paul, citing the account of Gad in II Samuel 24, refers to the “interchangability” of חזה and נביא. Paul, *Amos*, 240-241.

<sup>11</sup> This is essentially the question posed by Jehoshaphat when, having been confronted by the *fait accompli* of Ahab’s four hundred prophets having spoken, he asks, “Is there not yet a prophet *of* Yahweh that we may inquire of him?” (Jehoshaphat had earlier already asked that they inquire for a word *of* Yahweh.) When Micaiah, prophet of Yahweh, is summoned, by Ahab’s officer he is requested to “Let your [Micaiah’s] word be like the word” of the other prophets, that is, those not of Yahweh (1 Kings 22:5-14).

<sup>12</sup> So Moses, for instance, receives the commission, “*Thus* you will say . . .” (Exodus 3:14,15); and “*the* words” [הדברים] are set onto the mouth of Aaron (Exodus 4:15). See section 3.2, above.

For the corresponding question of true prophet versus false prophet, the distinction can be made, Hummel notes, by “what may unhesitatingly be called a *doctrinal or confessional*



Amaziah introduces his charge against Amos to the king with the words: “Thus said Amos” [כה אָמַר עָמוּס]. There is no hint here that Amos’s commission may be from Yahweh or any other source outside of himself. Amos’s לֹא נְבִיא is the defense of irony that he is a prophet not in and of himself (for *of* himself he is a herdsman), but *of* Yahweh: “But Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, go prophesy.” (7:14). In this way Amos turns the tables, exposing Amaziah in his arrogance. For if Amos speaks by the authority of Yahweh, Amaziah presumes to speak by the authority of a king, and an illegitimate one at that. Amos’s argument is plain: He prophesies not in his own name (7:11) but in the name of Yahweh (7:16). And the condemnation for receiving Amos as anything but Yahweh’s prophet will be great (7:16-17).

#### 4.2 Amos’s Vision and Intercession

Amos is brought into the סוּד (council or counsel) of Yahweh.<sup>13</sup> M. Saebo states that “the

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criterion. The test is in what the prophet teaches and preaches, whether or not it harmonizes with the rest of revelation, not in accidents of behavior as such.” Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh*, 179. This distinction is not as self-evident as it may seem, as evidenced Crenshaw’s survey of several criteria (e.g., “Promise of Weal or Woe,” “Revelatory Form,” “Immoral Conduct [of the prophet]”). Crenshaw arrives at his less than satisfactory conclusion that “the attempt to distinguish true from false prophecy in Israel must be abandoned.” This leaves him holding that “a degree of fluidity between the two is inevitable.” James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 48-62.

<sup>13</sup> Am. 3:7. Amos’s contention against Amaziah is undergirded by the larger context that it is Amos, not Amaziah, who is brought into the Yahweh-council. This is proven by the visions given to Amos. Amaziah surely betrays his own cognizance of these visions by addressing Amos as “Seer” [חֹזֵה]. (Am. 7:12; see above.)

That the council is revealed to Amos may be understood along with the distinction drawn at Jeremiah 23:18-22 that the prophets of Yahweh stand in the council of Yahweh while the false prophets do not. About which, see below, 5.3.

concrete usage of the word [סוד]" is "dominated by the meaning 'assembly'/'circle.'" According to Saebo, this is expanded to "abstract usages such as 'decision' or 'secret.'"<sup>14</sup> Shalom Paul translates סוד as "counsel" at Amos 3:7, and comments that "the institution of prophecy is founded on the basic premise that God makes his will known to chosen individuals."<sup>15</sup> Andersen and Freedman speak of "the 'council' (*sōd* [3:7]), which was experienced as vision."<sup>16</sup> According to Andersen and Freedman, סוד "is usually the conclave in which plans are made, an intimate circle . . . By metonymy it could be the plan itself . . . Both meanings are suitable at Amos 3:7."<sup>17</sup> Yahweh reveals the secret of his council to his prophet in the visions.<sup>18</sup> Yahweh is designated as ארני,<sup>19</sup> ארני referencing him as the "judge of the whole earth."<sup>20</sup> Amos is named as

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<sup>14</sup> M. Saebo, "סוד," *TLOT*, II:794.

Patterson states that the primary meaning of סוד "is 'confidential speech' . . . hence, 'counsel' . . . This is extended to indicate a circle of trusted intimates who give their advice." R.D. Patterson, "סוד," *TWOT*, II:619.

<sup>15</sup> Paul, *Amos*, 112-113.

Paul comments: "The prophet stands in the presence of God (Jer 15:1, 19), is privy to the divine council (Isa 6; Jer 23:18, 22), and as the spokesman for the Deity is apprised in advance as to the plans of his God."

<sup>16</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 190.

<sup>17</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 399.

<sup>18</sup> Andersen and Freedman state: "We should not assume . . . that the meeting and discussion always take place in a plenary session of the Lord's celestial court." Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 398.

<sup>19</sup> At 3:7 it is סודו, the ו suffix referring to the preceding title, ארני יהוה—the same title found when the word, the decree [רבר], of the council is revealed to Amos by the visions of chapter 7.

<sup>20</sup> Gottfried Quell, "κρυλος," *TDNT*, III:1061.

Yahweh's servant [עבד];<sup>21</sup> he will announce the decree of judgment revealed to him in the vision of Yahweh's סוד (counsel).<sup>22</sup>

The first vision of chapter 7 is that of the locusts (7:1):

Lord Yahweh [אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה] made visible to me this:  
Look! He is forming locusts just as the second crop begins  
to sprout (that is, the crop following the king's harvest).

Upon seeing the devastation of the locusts, Amos speaks on behalf of Israel (7:2-3):

וְאָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה סְלַח-נָא  
מִי יִקּוּם יַעֲקֹב כִּי קָטָן הוּא  
trans.: *I said: "Lord Yahweh, Forgive! Please!  
How will Jacob stand, for he is so small?"*

Again, upon seeing Yahweh's judgment delivered through fire, Amos intercedes (7:5):

אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה חַדְלֵ-נָא  
מִי יִקּוּם יַעֲקֹב כִּי קָטָן הוּא  
trans.: *"Lord Yahweh, Stop! Please!  
How will Jacob stand, for he is so small?"*

Hearing the prophet's intercession, Yahweh responds with reversal (7:3):

נָחַם יְהוָה עַל-זֹאת לֹא תִהְיֶה אָמַר יְהוָה  
trans.: *Yahweh repented of this. "It will not be," said Yahweh.*

and (7:6),

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<sup>21</sup> According to Westermann, עבד "can describe the officer and the minister of the king." Claus Westermann, "עבד," *TLOT*, II:822.

See also section 3.3 for comment on עבד and אֲדֹנָי with respect to Moses.

<sup>22</sup> Mays comments, "The fact that Yahweh bestows vision upon him puts him in the divine presence . . . By the vision Amos has been selected as the one person on earth to whom the heavenly king discloses his counsel." Mays, *Amos*, 128.

Cf. Ross: "For the real source of [the prophet's] authority we must step behind the scenes, so to speak, into the divine council itself." James F. Ross, "The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger," in *Prophecy in Israel*, ed. David L. Peterson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 114.

נחם יהוה על-זאת גם-היא לא תהיה אמר אדני יהוה

trans.: *Yahweh repented of this. "Even this will not be," said Lord Yahweh.*

This dialogue between Yahweh and Amos reveals much about the prophetic office.<sup>23</sup>

The exchange between Yahweh and the prophet falls within the institution of Yahweh. The order has been set in place by him, for it is Yahweh himself who has made the proceedings or decrees of the council visible to his servant the prophet.<sup>24</sup> Within this framework Amos speaks on behalf of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Several questions need to be addressed: First, for what does the prophet appeal in his plea to Forgive! and to Stop!? Second, what is Yahweh's repentance? And, what is the role of the prophetic office in this exchange?

The prophetic plea is for Yahweh to forgive [סלה] and to stop [חרל]. סלה is to forgive

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<sup>23</sup> Concerning the dynamic setting of the סוד, Seitz remarks: "God speaks to his divine court, from which various voices respond, in a manner similar to what is depicted in 1 Kings 22 ('and one said one thing, and another said another')." Christopher Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109:2 (1990): 235.

<sup>24</sup> גלה: At 3:7, Yahweh "makes visible" his council to his prophets. גלה serves to define the visions seen [חזה] by Amos (1:1). They are not some inwardly generated ecstatic vision (counter to Amaziah), but an external word made tangible, visible, to him. The verb גלה finds its object at the point of human eyes and ears (see Hans-Jurgen Zobel, "גלה," *TDOT*, II:480) and refers to visual and verbal revelation, even to theophany. (See Westermann and R. Albertz, "גלה," *TLOT*, I:318.) The revelation is given in order to be perceived and comprehended physically by the prophet.

This coincides to ראה used at chapter 7, where "God showed [ראה] me this . . ." Stuart notes that ראה "can mean 'reveal,' 'inform,' as well as 'make visible,' [so that] this vision and the others that follow it do not emphasize visual over auditory phenomena." Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 371.

<sup>25</sup> Mays notes that Amos's intercessions "are a characteristically prophetic function." Mays, *Amos*, 138.

sin, and is used only in reference to the Lord as subject.<sup>26</sup> The plea comes from the mouth of a prophet or a king.<sup>27</sup> The prophet's intercession is not for Yahweh to relent temporarily from carrying out his decree upon Israel (i.e., "Jacob," v.2), but to absolve Israel of sin. As Shalom Paul notes, "man may 'forgive' (מחל) individual wrongdoings, but only God can grant complete 'pardon' (סלח)."<sup>28</sup> The plea is not just for a period of relief.<sup>29</sup> It is the plea for "complete expurgation," for "unconditional pardon."<sup>30</sup>

The prophetic appeal for forgiveness is not based upon any worthiness of Israel (Jacob).<sup>31</sup> Nor is it based upon any forthcoming contrition. The appeal is based solely upon Yahweh's

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<sup>26</sup> The word סלח has only Yahweh as its subject. Kaiser notes that the word belongs together with a few other, such as "to create" in that they are used only of God. Walter C. Kaiser, "סלח," *TWOT*, II:626. (Although Kaiser does not mention it here, "create" is used solely of God when it is ברא in the Qal.)

<sup>27</sup> At Exodus 34:9 and Numbers 14:19 it is Moses. At 1 Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50, it is King Solomon (see also 2 Chronicles 6:21-29). At Psalm 25:11 it is David. At Daniel 9:19, it is Daniel.

<sup>28</sup> Paul, *Amos*, p. 229.

<sup>29</sup> Along with "pardon" and "forgive," Holladay also gives "practice forbearance." Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 257. Holladay does not elucidate further; is this "practicing forbearance" an ongoing delivery of forgiveness, or is it only a moderation or restraint by Yahweh?

According to Brown, Driver, Briggs סלח means to "forgive, pardon." *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 801.

<sup>30</sup> Paul, *Amos*, p. 229.

<sup>31</sup> As Brueggemann notes: "Jacob is small and Esau is great" (Genesis 27:16-18). The narrative is concerned with the right of inheritance. The term indicates that Jacob has no claim upon the estate and shares in it only by extra-legal arrangements." Walter Brueggemann, "Amos' Intercessory Formula," *Vetus Testamentum*, XIX (1969): 386.

mercy.<sup>32</sup> The petition is for nothing short of salvation, for the appeal is for Yahweh to forgive and to stop [חרל]:

“Lord Yahweh, Forgive! Please!” (7:2-3)

“Lord Yahweh, Stop! Please!” (7:5)

In these two parallel petitions, to forgive [סלח] is to quit [חרל]. In each case, it is a plea for “the removal of the two judgments.”<sup>33</sup> The sense in which “to forgive” [סלח] means “to quit” [חרל] is simply this: If Yahweh forgives, he quits punishment. Anything short of this is not true סלח. If all sins are forgiven, there is no longer anything for which to punish. As Paul notes, “the prophet requests an unconditional pardon. As such there would be no need to punish Israel anymore.”<sup>34</sup>

The boldness of the prophetic intercession, and the continuity of the plea from סלח to חרל, is so stark as to seem untenable. Indeed, Andersen and Freedman do not see the continuity or equivalence, but speak rather of a decrease or diminishment in the prophetic plea from סלח

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<sup>32</sup> The appeal for סלח is based solely upon Yahweh’s self-revelation to Moses of being the God of mercy [חסד], (Exodus 34:6) and echoes back to the intercession of Moses where Yahweh is asked to סלח according to his abundant חסד (Numbers 14:19). Stamm notes, “without mercy there can be no forgiveness.” J.J. Stamm, “סלח,” *TLOT*, II:800-801.

<sup>33</sup> C.F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, X:309-310.

Keil and Delitzsch note that “these two judgments are not intended to effect the utter annihilation of the nation of God, but simply its refinement and the rooting out of the sinners.” It is unclear why this conclusion is necessary or justifiable. The context of the verse seems to indicate otherwise. In the face of this judgment, Jacob will not stand [קום]. It is difficult to see what in the text would lead to the conclusion that Yahweh’s delivery of judgment would be less than “utter annihilation.” According to Amsler, קום “indicates that which resists attacks and endures; in contrast to that which perishes.” S. Amsler, “קום,” *TLOT*, III:1138-1139.

<sup>34</sup> Paul, *Amos*, p. 229.

(more definite) to חרל (less definite):

The forgiveness granted in the context of the first vision [v. 1-3] was the last time. All Amos can hope for now is that the severity of the punishment will be abated so that little Jacob might at least survive.<sup>35</sup>

But Andersen and Freedman's contention that "all Amos can hope for now is that the severity of the punishment will be abated" should be tested against their crucial contention regarding Yahweh's repentance: "the divine repentance is real . . . that if it is not real on the part of God (i.e., that he does not and cannot change his mind), then the story is a charade without significance."<sup>36</sup>

This pivotal understanding regarding Yahweh's repentance may also be allowed to inform the understanding of Yahweh's judgment. That is, if the judgment is not real—and not the true judgment for unholiness—then the verdict of judgment would also be (to use Andersen and Freedman's term) "a charade without significance." To drive the connection one step further, if the repentance of Yahweh is real (as Andersen and Freedman assert), so too must be the judgment from which he repents.

This continuum, as posited by Andersen and Freedman, would initially seem to fit with a quick reading of the general flow of the judgments. First, Yahweh repents of the judgment delivered through locusts (7:3). Second, Yahweh repents of the judgment delivered through fire (7:6). Then Yahweh does *not* repent of the final judgment delivered by his own hand (7:7-9).

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<sup>35</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 749.

<sup>36</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 645.

But the continuum is not continuous. There are differences in the judgments;<sup>37</sup> there are differences in whether or not Yahweh carries out the judgments. As a cause of the latter, there is a difference in whether or not the prophet intercedes. Finally, the critical variable may be not whether Yahweh repents or, to the contrary, carries out his judgment, but rather, whether or not the prophet makes the appeal for Yahweh's repentance. When the prophet intercedes, Yahweh repents. When the prophet is silent, Yahweh carries out his verdict.

Why does the prophet not intercede in the third vision (vv. 7-9)? As Shalom Paul notes, "Amos refrains from responding and interceding" because he "realizes that the die is cast . . . the divine decree is now final and absolute and precludes any possibility of prophetic action."<sup>38</sup> More definitely, the cause of the absence of the prophet's intercession might be found in Yahweh's own declaration: "I will not pass over them anymore" (7:8). The prophet refrains from interceding not because the sin is "greater" this time, but because Yahweh himself has precluded intercession.<sup>39</sup> This does not diminish the prophet's intercession with regard to the first two judgments as if the prophetic appeal to Yahweh is only for lesser judgments. Rather, it emphasizes the prophet's intercession by demonstrating that Yahweh himself so regards the

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<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Stuart contends that there is a difference in the judgments in that the first two judgments portray a "literal punishment vision" while the last judgment attaches "no significance at all to what is actually seen." Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 373.

Possibly more significantly, Shalom Paul notes that the first two judgments are delivered instrumentally, through physical means (locusts and fire), while the final judgment is delivered by Yahweh himself ("I will rise up with a sword"), so that in the third vision it is no longer a "messenger or an agent of the Deity," but "the Lord himself who is about to render judgment." Paul, *Amos*, p. 236.

<sup>38</sup> Paul, *Amos*, p. 236.

<sup>39</sup> See below, chapter on Jeremiah.



prophetic intercession that he may either repent as a result of it, or, having precluded his own repentance, he altogether forestalls even the opportunity for the prophetic intercession for that repentance.

What is Yahweh's repentance? When Amos intercedes the first time the answer is stated in 7:3: "Yahweh repented [נחם] of this. 'It will not be,' said Yahweh." The answer to the second intercession of Amos is stated in 7:6: "Yahweh repented [נחם] of this. 'Even this will not be,' said Lord Yahweh." That it is startling to conceive of Yahweh "repenting" in the usual understanding of the word is evident when modern translations render the word into English as "relent" or "change of mind."<sup>40</sup>

When the word is applied to a man or Israel, Scripture's meaning is straightforward: it is reversal, total about-turn, complete change in intent and direction. The condemnation given through the prophet Jeremiah that "no man repented of his evil" (8:6) speaks not of man's failure to lessen his evil, but his failure to turn back to Yahweh. At Exodus 13:17 Yahweh leads his people away from the land of the Philistines "lest perhaps the people reverse themselves [נחם] . . . and return to Egypt." Here, נחם would be a reversal away from Yahweh. Whether a change in direction to Yahweh or from Yahweh, נחם speaks not of moderation or relenting, but of turning around, a reversal.

This distinction is given further definition with the verb שׁוּב. In the aforementioned

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<sup>40</sup> According to NIV and NKJV (also, Shalom Paul) it is, "the Lord relented"; NASB (also, Stuart) translates it as, "the Lord changed His mind."

נחם (Niphal) means "be sorry," "suffer grief," "repent," "have regrets," "change of heart," "relent regarding," and the like. Holladay, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 234; Brown, Driver, Briggs, *The New Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 636.

verse, שׁוּב is used in the converse position to נָחַם so that the reason man needs to turn [נָחַם] from his evil is that he has already turned [שׁוּב] to his own way (which is evil). Also in Jeremiah 8 the people have turned [שׁוּב] from Yahweh and they refuse to return [שׁוּב] (8:5). Because they have turned [שׁוּב] to their own way, no man repents [נָחַם] of his evil (8:6). In both of these cases, the “repentance” of נָחַם would simply be a reversal of the original turning of שׁוּב.

This understanding of נָחַם as a total reversal may give difficulties for how God in action may be perceived. Is Yahweh immutable, or is he like a man who changes his mind?<sup>41</sup> Clearly, when נָחַם is applied to Yahweh, it does not refer to a “repentance” from sin as it does for man. It refers to Yahweh reversing himself.<sup>42</sup> But while it is one thing to say that Yahweh relents or holds back from judgment, it may be quite another to say that he actually repents in the sense that he reverses himself. Fretheim notes,

The problem is rooted in the fact that the word ‘repent’ is a translation of two Hebrew terms, *nicham* and *shuv*. The former is the word normally used for divine repentance, the latter for human repentance of sin (and also sometimes for divine repentance). While *nicham* may occasionally be used for human

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<sup>41</sup> As Wilson notes, “On the surface, such language seems inconsistent, if not contradictory, with certain passages which affirm God’s immutability: ‘God is not a man . . . that he should repent’ (I Samuel 15:29 contra v. 11); ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind’ (Ps. 110:4).” Marvin R. Wilson, “נָחַם,” *TWOT*, 2:570.

<sup>42</sup> Parunak notes the parallelism and polarity of נָחַם in “retract a declared punishment” and, “retract a declared blessing.” H. Van Dyke Parunak, “A Semantic Survey of NHM,” *Biblica*, 56 (1975): 525.

This “polarity” indicates a function for נָחַם whereby the action repented of (whether judgment or salvation) finds its corresponding reversal in the נָחַם action. That is, נָחַם of judgment is to סָלַח, and סָלַח leaves only life and salvation.

repentance, it is doubtful that it ever refers to repentance of sin.<sup>43</sup>

Fretheim notes Jeremiah 8:6 as “the only instance” where it is a repentance from evil.<sup>44</sup>

Contrary to Fretheim’s argument, this passage alone (Jer. 8:6) would suffice to demonstrate that

נחם can refer to human repentance from sin. נחם also indicates human repentance when

Scripture speaks of Ephraim’s turning back [שוב] and repenting [נחם] (Jeremiah 31:19).<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, Fretheim’s segregation of one word (שוב) as belonging to the sphere of human

reaction and the other (נחם) to the sphere of divine must be considered artificial in view of

passages such as Joel 2:14 and Jonah 3:9, which connect שוב and נחם in tandem in reference to

Yahweh: “he will turn back [שוב] and repent [נחם].”

One way to alleviate this difficulty of understanding Yahweh’s repentance in view of his immutability is to set it as anthropopathic so that, far from being a true reversal in the countenance or judgment of Yahweh, it “only appears that God's purposes have changed,” and this “appearance” is only to “man’s limited, earthly, finite perspective.”<sup>46</sup> This solution serves the purpose of conserving the “immutability” of God. But does it recognize the “personhood” of

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<sup>43</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “The Repentance of God, A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10, 1 (June 1988): 50.

<sup>44</sup> Fretheim, “The Repentance of God”: 66, footnote 13.

Jeremiah 8:6 speaks of “no man repent[ing] of his evil [רעה].” Fretheim comments that in this context רעה may refer to the effects of man’s sinful behavior.

<sup>45</sup> Concerning שוב in Jeremiah 31:18-19, Thompson comments that “In the context, return from exile is the primary sense . . . But the sense of repentance is here also.” J. A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, N.I.C.O.T., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 574.

<sup>46</sup> Wilson, “נחם,” *TWOT*, 2:571.

the God who reveals himself under the name Yahweh?<sup>47</sup> As Andersen and Freedman point out in reference to Yahweh's אלה, "the biblical God is always and uncompromisingly personal: he is above all a person, neither more nor less."<sup>48</sup>

Because his "personhood" is true and not chimerical, Yahweh's dialogue and interaction with men is true and not chimerical. As Stuart asserts,

Yahweh's response constitutes a genuine reversal of divine intent. The scriptures consistently witness to the possibility that God may choose to do something he had not planned, or not to do something he has planned, in response to human appeal.<sup>49</sup>

Standing in contradistinction to an impersonal God who neither interacts with man nor changes his mind with reference to man, is the God of Israel who reveals himself as the Lord of whom it is "one of the prime [*sic*] attributes . . . his willingness (at times) to relent and renounce."<sup>50</sup>

Bound to the revelation of a God revealed according to his name, with his personhood intact, is the reality of the God who interacts authentically and tangibly, incarnationally, with

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<sup>47</sup> As noted by Kuyper, "The anthropomorphism, however valuable as it may be for purposes of communication, poses limitations in the understanding of God. Certainly the Old Testament itself would be the first to admit the limitation of anthropomorphism." Lester J. Kuyper, "The Suffering and the Repentance of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22, 3 (September 1969): 257. See also, Lester J. Kuyper, "The Repentance of God," *The Reformed Review* 18, 4 (May 1965): 3-16.

<sup>48</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 644.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 373.

<sup>50</sup> Paul, *Amos*, p. 230. Almost inexplicably, Paul follows this by stating, "However, there is no indication that he has pardoned his people as Amos had requested. The Lord does not respond here as he did to Moses . . . Numbers 14:19-20."

Actually, there is every indication that Yahweh has pardoned his people, lest Yahweh's אלה be emptied of all content (see following by Andersen and Freedman). Yahweh's statement of rescission cancels the delivery of judgment: "'It will not be,' said Yahweh." This is pardon.

man.<sup>51</sup> As Andersen and Freedman state:

Throughout and in every case, it should be understood that the divine repentance is real; that the meaning and value of the story depend on the transaction between God and prophet, or God and people; and that if it is not real on the part of God (i.e., that he does not and cannot change his mind), then the story is a charade without significance.<sup>52</sup>

In this way, the repentance of Yahweh can only be understood as realistically and tangibly as is the repentance of man.

Since “repentance” indicates “a genuine reversal of divine intent” (as Stuart states), any difficulty in attributing actual repentance to Yahweh will not be alleviated by softening or moderating the meaning of repentance [נחם]. It will be answered with the recognition that Yahweh, unlike man, is not “sorry/contrite over [his] own sins . . . since everything he does or threatens is appropriate and right.”<sup>53</sup> The cause of Yahweh’s repentance is not found in

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<sup>51</sup> Concerning the word *incarnational*, see above, 3.3.

<sup>52</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 645.

<sup>53</sup> Paul R. Raabe, “The Two ‘Faces’ of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament,” in *Every Tongue Confess*, eds. Gerald S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn, Michigan: The Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 300.

contrition for sins.<sup>54</sup> It is found in the revelation of his name, for the sake of his own person.<sup>55</sup>

From this recognition, David prays (Psalm 25:1):

For the sake of your name, O Yahweh,  
Forgive [סלח] my sin!

As Fretheim notes, “it is focused on a divine faithfulness and steadfastness which finds no parallel among human beings.”<sup>56</sup>

Finally, the revealed repentance of Yahweh is the very articulation of forgiveness into the

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<sup>54</sup> Andersen and Freedman explain, “What is meant, we believe, is that Yahweh does not change his mind (=repent) the way human beings do, who often do so frivolously, capriciously, or arbitrarily, whereas Yahweh does so only for cause, as human beings should.” Andersen and Freedman, *Amos*, 644.

While Andersen and Freedman do note that as Yahweh repents, so “human beings should,” nevertheless, their explanation at this juncture seems to miss the essential distinction between Yahweh’s repentance and man’s. It is not that one is “arbitrary” or “capricious” and the other more serious or consistent (repentance by definition will be an abandonment of the “consistent”). It is that Yahweh’s  $\text{נחם}$  is his reversal from the delivery of judgment’s condemnation against evil, while man’s is repentance from his evil (e.g., Jeremiah 8:6 and 31:19, as cited above).

<sup>55</sup> Speaking here of  $\text{נחם}$  not as that which can be predicated of God according to his “nature.” It is not a matter of essentiality or expectability. It is that which is according to his mercy [חסד], according to his gracious, unexpected condescension in having chosen to make himself known by his name, Yahweh. (Cf. above, 3.2, note 28 and 3.3, note 88.)

In commenting on a different but related construction (i.e., when Yahweh says, “I do not change,” Malachi 3:6), Smith notes that “God is not stating an abstract theological principle concerning the immutability of his nature. He is simply denying the charge of his disputants that he is unreliable, undependable, capricious. The question is about Yahweh’s fidelity, not his nature.” Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 331. As Ashley states it (commenting on the same question from a different context), “one must be careful to read in these [statements of Yahweh’s constancy] an invariability in purpose rather than a modern, pseudoscientific kind of unapproachable immutability.” Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 478.

<sup>56</sup> Fretheim, “The Repentance of God”: 52.

life of the sinner. The repentance is important not because it provides a handle by which to define or classify Yahweh. Because he is not an idol, he will not be delimited by man's definitions. The repentance is important because it defines man with reference to Yahweh's mercy, his compassion (חַסְדִּים Piel, and רַחֲמֵי). Due to Yahweh's verdict of having reversed himself, the sinner will stand [קִיָּם] before Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> As stated by Kuyper,

The changeability of God in response to the prayer of man indicates that man is in a meaningful relationship with God. Man at prayer is not a puppet whose words are set on tape to be spoken at the proper time. Rather God takes into account the pleas of His prophets.<sup>58</sup>

Ultimately, the content and benefit of Yahweh's repentance is his mercy, his compassion, and his saving actions.

When the prophet appeals to Yahweh to Forgive! and Stop! the petition is for nothing less than salvation and life. סָלַח gives the forgiveness that is the "removal of judgment"; it is an unconditional pardon so that there is "no need to punish anymore."<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, the meaning of סָלַח is derived not only from the lexicon but from the revelation of the personhood of Yahweh. When Yahweh responds to the prophet's appeal for סָלַח, that response will be a full delineation of God's grace. Yahweh's response indicates that the prophetic plea to forgive and stop is the plea for Yahweh's repentance.

Because Yahweh does repent, sin is forgiven. Yahweh repents of the evil [רָע].<sup>60</sup> That

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<sup>57</sup> See below, footnote 61.

<sup>58</sup> Kuyper, "The Suffering and Repentance of God": 275.

<sup>59</sup> See above.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Jeremiah 18:8.

which separates Israel from Yahweh is the evil [רע] of Israel. This is the evil of which Israel is called to repentance.<sup>61</sup> The evil [רע] of which Yahweh repents is not Yahweh's sin but simply the delivery of the רע to the ones who are evil.<sup>62</sup> It is the dispensing of the ultimate result of evil.<sup>63</sup>

The ultimate outcome of evil is death, for death is the verdict against those guilty of רע.<sup>64</sup> Yahweh's רע is simply the execution of the verdict against the people for their רע, and that comes against the sinner as destruction and death. This is the evil of which Yahweh repents.<sup>65</sup> It is a repentance which is the gift of salvation and life.

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<sup>61</sup> Jeremiah 4:4, 8:6, *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> According to Bosman, "the punishment of disobedient and sinful individuals was regarded as just and not as evil. But when judgment was passed upon Israel as a whole, it was often referred to as evil." Bosman further notes,

The explanation of evil offered by wisdom is predominately that of retribution and the disturbance of order. Evil as human suffering is well deserved if it is seen as the punishment for individual or collective sin. Undeniable evidence of this sapiential point of view is found in Amos and is especially true of the frequent references made to Israel's disobedience and injustice.

H. L. Bosman, "Does disaster strike only when the Lord sends it? Prophetic eschatology and the origin of evil in Amos 3:6," *Old Testament Essays* ½ (1988): 26-27.

<sup>63</sup> Jeremiah speaks of the evil [רעה] Yahweh brings against his people as "the *fruit* [פרי] of their plans" (Jeremiah 6:19). פרי is "indicative of [the] consequences" of their רעה (see Victor P. Hamilton, "פרי," *TWOT*, II:734). This is the רעה evident when Yahweh says of them, "They go forth from evil [רעה] to evil [רעה] and they do not know me" (Jeremiah 9:3).

<sup>64</sup> Those whose "course is evil [רעה]" will fall [נפל] because Yahweh has brought evil [רעה] upon them (Jeremiah 23:10, 12). Against these Yahweh will bring punishment (Jeremiah 23:34); they will be put away from the face [פני] of Yahweh (Jeremiah 23:39). As remarked by van der Woude, "[Because men] can live only by the grace of the attentive countenance or look of God, they must perish from the averted glance of God." A.S. van der Woude, "פנינו," *TLOT*, II:1008. (Cf. Psalm 88:15, etc.)

<sup>65</sup> E.g., Amos 7, Jeremiah 18:8, Jeremiah 26:13-19.



As the prophetic appeal is for salvation and life, so also the benefit of Yahweh's repentance is salvation and life. For it is a turning-away from, a complete reversal of, the delivery of death. The repentance of Yahweh is real. It is made tangible as it is incarnationally delivered into the life of the sinner by the prophet's words and actions. At this point the prophetic office is given definition as a dynamic, transactive office of intercession or mediation between Yahweh and his redeemed people.<sup>66</sup> To the people the prophet pleads for their repentance from evil; to Yahweh the prophet pleads for repentance from the judgment and delivery of evil's ultimate result. Because the plea for repentance is based upon the revealed name, the people know that according to that name their God saves his people.<sup>67</sup> And according to that name, Yahweh forgives.<sup>68</sup>

#### 4.3 Conclusion

Because Yahweh has named the prophet as his servant [עבד] to reveal his counsel, the prophetic intercession resulting from the revelation of Yahweh's decrees may be understood as proper to the office of prophet.<sup>69</sup> The consequent transaction between the prophet and Yahweh

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<sup>66</sup> Von Rad, placing the prophet as a holder of a cultic office, speaks of the prophetic office as "the supreme office through which the proper intercourse between Jahweh and Israel is to be carried out." Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. I, 97, 99.

<sup>67</sup> See above on Moses, 3.2.

<sup>68</sup> Psalm 25:1.

<sup>69</sup> A propriety that will not exclude the priestly office or the kingly office. This can be seen, for example, at the account of Solomon's prayer, 1 Kings 8.

Shalom Paul notes that "one of the most basic and prime functions of the prophet is to serve as an advocate for his people and defend them by acting as an intercessory mediator between them and the Lord." Paul, *Amos*, 229. (Cf. Stuart: "[Amos] stands as a mediator in a

is real, as also Yahweh's consequent repentance. In having revealed his counsel to Amos, Yahweh has also installed him as his עֵבֶר *in* Israel,<sup>70</sup> as the one set to reveal the divine counsel to Israel.

Placed in the midst of Yahweh's people, Amos stands in weakness, vulnerable over against Amaziah and Jeroboam.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Amaziah and Israel are to know (because it is embedded in Amos's message) that it is specifically Amos who is designated and located as mediator for them. By Yahweh's institution intercession is made on behalf of Israel. Yahweh responds to the prophetic intercession, and he repents and forgives. Hearing the prophetic proclamation of Yahweh's forgiveness, Israel lives.

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position to make intercession for his people." Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 371.)

<sup>70</sup> Amos 7:15: "Go prophesy to my people Israel."

<sup>71</sup> Mays cites 2:12, 6:3, and 9:10 as "other indications that Amos carried out his vocation in the midst of bitter violence." Mays, *Amos*, 60.

## CHAPTER 5

### JEREMIAH'S INTERCESSION

#### 5.1 The Expectation of Jeremiah's Prophetic Entreaty

While Amos had contended for the legitimacy of his prophetic office over against the priest Amaziah and King Jeroboam, Jeremiah finds himself contending against other prophets. Clashing with the false prophets, Jeremiah lays out the expectation that, if they are true prophets, they will make entreaty to Yahweh (27:18):

וְאִם־נְבִיאִים הֵם וְאִם־יֵשׁ דְּבַר־יְהוָה אִתָּם  
יִפְנְעוּ־נָא בְיְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

trans.: *And if they are prophets, and if the Word of Yahweh is with them,  
Let them, please, make entreaty to Yahweh of hosts.*

Although the verb פנע is not a common word for prophetic intercession,<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah has already used it alongside פלל, which speaks of forensic pleading for vindication.<sup>2</sup> The use of פנע may be intended to indicate an urgency for the prophetic petitions.<sup>3</sup> The prophet is interposed

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<sup>1</sup> פנע is not elsewhere used of the prophetic intercessions, except at Jeremiah 27:18 and Isaiah 53:12 (see below, note 3). Job speaks of “entreaty” [פנע] to God, 21:15. פנע often refers to entreaty of one man to another (e.g., Ruth 1:16, Jeremiah 36:25).

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 7:16: “Do not intercede [פלל] on behalf of this people, and do not lift up for their sake a cry or prayer [תפלה], and do not make entreaty [פנע] to me.” Cf., Ap-Thomas, “Notes on Some Terms Relating to Prayer,” *Vetus Testamentum* VI (1956), 235-238.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Gesenius: “to assail anyone with petitions, to urge him.” *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 665. (Gesenius lists the most common sense of פנע as “to strike upon, or against.”)

At Isaiah 53 the verb פנע is found used in both senses, “to strike upon,” and “to intercede.” First Yahweh will cause “the iniquity of us all” to be visited-upon [פנע] the Servant [עבד] (53:6). Then the Servant makes intercession [פנע] for those whose iniquity has been visited-upon [פנע] him (53:12).

Motyer reconciles this parallel use of פנע by stating the “simple” meaning of “to meet,

between Yahweh and the sinful people.<sup>4</sup> He brings entreaty [פָּנַע] to Yahweh in order to speak advocacy on their behalf.

This is more than just the implication that the prophet might at times choose to make entreaty to Yahweh. The false prophets (the prophets of the lie, the prophets not sent, 27:15-16) had no compunction in presenting themselves as those with a divine message and impressing with ecstatic exhibitions of many sorts.<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah counters by setting entreaty [פָּנַע] to Yahweh as conditional to the prophetic office. The prophetic entreaty is given as the expectable consequence of true prophecy and of possessing Yahweh's word: "If [אִם] they are prophets, and if [אִם] Yahweh's word is with them, let them, please, make entreaty to Yahweh of hosts" (27:18).<sup>6</sup> It is not enough to speak only to the people. The prophet is interposed between Israel and Yahweh, and he will make entreaty to Yahweh for them.

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reach, to arrive at" (causative: "to cause to arrive at"), so that "our iniquity" was *caused to arrive at* [פָּנַע] Him who "was the meeting point for the iniquity of us all." He is now the one who intercedes for us. He "cause[s] [our] plea to reach someone's [Yahweh's] ears." He "introduce[s] [us] into someone's [Yahweh's] presence." J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 431, 443.

<sup>4</sup> Commenting on פָּנַע at Isaiah 59:16, Motyer notes that "*intervene*/'interpose' [*sic*] means to stand between people and the consequences of their moral collapse." Motyer, *Isaiah*, 491. Cf. Rhodes, "Israel's Prophets as Intercessors," 123.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 27:9: "Do not listen to your prophets [נְבִיאִים], your diviners [קְסָמִים], your dreamers [חֲלָמִים], your conjurers [עֲנָנִים], or your sorcerers [כַּשְׁפֵּי], who speak to you."

<sup>6</sup> Because the verb פָּנַע is imperfect, it would seem that this is given not as a one-time challenge for the other prophets to make entreaty, but as an ongoing description of a true prophet. Here the tense of the אִם conditional clause would be determined by the imperfect tense of the פָּנַע apodosis. Gesenius notes that אִם followed by the imperfect refers to a condition and its consequence occurring in the present or future. Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, 494-495.

This presumption of prophetic entreaty is surely embedded in Yahweh's instruction to Jeremiah. Yahweh educes the names of past prophets in order to forestall Jeremiah's expectable entreaty (15:1):

אִם-יַעֲמֹד מֹשֶׁה וְשָׁמוּאֵל לְפָנַי  
אֵין נִפְשִׁי אֶל-הָעָם הַזֶּה

trans.: *Even if Moses and Samuel stood before me,  
my life [my person] would not be toward this people.*

For Moses and Samuel to “stand [עמד] at the face” of Yahweh is for them to stand before him for the purpose of pleading on behalf of Israel. As Ronald Allen puts it, this is “a posture of prayer and intercession.”<sup>7</sup>

That the mention of Samuel's name would present the typology for prophetic intercession recalls his advocacy for Israel. When Israel needed deliverance from the Philistines, she appealed desperately to Samuel for intercession.<sup>8</sup> But the sequence leading to Samuel's intercession originates not with Israel's request but from the prophet's preceding promise of intercession. The sequence is this: First, in gathering Israel together, Samuel promises intercession;<sup>9</sup> second, Israel requests the promised prophetic intercession; then, Samuel intercedes for Israel by means of sacrifice [עולה] and the plea [זעק]<sup>10</sup> for help. This intercession

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald B. Allen, “עמד,” *TWOT*, II:673.

Amsler notes that עמד “can express appearance to perform a specific assignment.” Further, “it refers to Jeremiah's intercessory office.” S. Amsler, “עמד,” *TLOT*, II:923-924.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 7:5-11.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Samuel 7:5: “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray [פלל] to Yahweh in your stead [בער].” On פלל and בער, see above, 2.2 and 3.3.

<sup>10</sup> Albertz speaks of זעק as “a cry of pain and a plea for help.” R. Albertz, “זעק [צעק],” *TLOT*, III:1089.

is met with Yahweh's answer.<sup>11</sup>

Israel had requested the prophet's intercession with the plea, "Do not cease to cry out for us to Yahweh our God."<sup>12</sup> Later, when Israel has again requested the prophet's intercession ("Pray [פּלִל] on behalf of your servants to Yahweh," 12:19), Samuel refers them to the holy Name. By that name they are to know that they are God's people, and in that name Samuel finds his authority to speak words and judge Israel.<sup>13</sup> Yahweh is with Samuel according to the revelation of His name as he had been with Moses.<sup>14</sup> This is according to the revelation [גִּלְיָה] of the Word of Yahweh [דְּבַר יְהוָה] to Samuel (1 Samuel 3:21) and according to Yahweh having made himself visible [מֵרָאָה] to him (3:15). Yahweh stationed [יָצַב] himself before Samuel (3:10), thereby establishing [אִמֵּן] him as prophet (3:20). Israel may know that the word from Samuel's mouth is the word from Yahweh's mouth. Samuel's word to Israel and Yahweh's word are an identity.<sup>15</sup>

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Hasel notes that with זַעַק Samuel "assume[s] the prophetic function of the interceding mediator, who cries to God for help and deliverance on behalf of others." G. Hasel, "זַעַק," *TDOT*, IV:122.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Samuel 7:9: "Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering [עֹלָה] to Yahweh, and Samuel cried out for help [זַעַק] to Yahweh on behalf of Israel; and Yahweh answered him."

<sup>12</sup> 1 Samuel 7:8: אֶל-תְּחַרֵּשׁ מִמֶּנּוּ מִזַּעַק אֶל-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

<sup>13</sup> 1 Samuel 12:22: "For Yahweh will not forsake his people, for the sake of his great name. For it has pleased Yahweh to make you a people for himself."

<sup>14</sup> 1 Samuel 3:19: יְהוָה הָיָה עִמּוֹ (see above, section 3.2, especially notes 32 and 34).

<sup>15</sup> The identity of Samuel's word with Yahweh's is so starkly complete that immediately after the Word of Yahweh comes to Samuel (3:21), it is *Samuel's* word coming to Israel (4:1):

Upon the request for intercession, Samuel's word (that is, the word by Yahweh's authorization) to Israel is this (12:23):

גַּם אֲנֹכִי חָלִילָה לִּי מִחַטָּא לַיהוָה  
מִחֲדַל לְהִתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַדְכֶם

trans.: *As for myself, far be it from me to sin before Yahweh  
in ceasing to intercede on your behalf.*

Previously, Eli had given warning to his sons by speaking of the futility of standing before God without a mediator: "If a man sins before Yahweh, who will intercede [פלל] for him?" (2:25).

Now, when Israel has been caught in sin before Yahweh, Samuel promises mediation.<sup>16</sup> Samuel said it would be a sin for him to cease [חדל] intercession, חדל referring to the cessation of a charge appointed to be carried out continuously.<sup>17</sup>

The account of King Saul giving sacrifice makes it evident that this continuing

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וַיְהִי דְבַר־שְׁמוּאֵל לְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל (trans.: "then the word of Samuel was to all Israel. ").

<sup>16</sup> Samuel to Israel (12:17): "Your evil is great which you have done before the eyes of Yahweh is asking for yourselves a king."

Klein notes, "If the great sin for Israel had been the choosing of a king . . . sin for Samuel would be to fail to carry out his prophetic, intercessory office . . . He promised continued prayer. We might better speak of v. 23 as a theological etiology for prophetic intercession." Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 119.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Samuel 1:23: מִחֲדַל לְהִתְפַּלֵּל ("to cease interceding").

חדל is often used in the context of that which is set to be done continuously. For example, at Numbers 9:13 חדל refers to the wrong cessation of the appointed Passover observation. In the parable of trees and bramble at Judges 9:9-11 it even speaks of the arrogance of considering that the olive tree or fig tree would cease [חדל] the appointed production of their respective fruit to grasp after lordship over the other trees, which has not been appointed to them. (Cf. 2 Chronicles 25:16; Ezekiel 2:5-7, etc.)

Freedman and Lundbom comment that Samuel here "promises to be a perpetual mediator between the people and Yahweh, saying he will not cease to pray." D.N. Freedman and J. Lundbom, "חדל," *TDOT*, IV:219.

intercession is a charge appointed to be carried out by the prophet. Absent the appointed prophet (therefore absent the specific imparted authority), Saul appropriates for himself the authority to make entreaty (13:12):

וּפְנֵי יְהוָה לֹא חִלֵּיתִי וְאַחֲאֶפֶק וְאַעֲלֶה הָעֹלָה  
trans.: *Since I had not made entreaty before Yahweh,  
I compelled myself and offered up a whole burnt offering.*

Saul sins in taking it upon himself, that is, in constraining himself [אֶפֶק], to stand before Yahweh. He does not have the bestowed authority to do so.

On the other hand, Samuel does not act according to his own compulsion. Samuel acts according to the authority conferred upon him by virtue of his prophetic office. He cannot but intercede [פָּלַל] on behalf of Israel, crying out [זָעַק] for her.<sup>18</sup> Yahweh’s answer to Samuel’s intercession is the deliverance of his people (salvation from the Philistines). This includes the forgiveness of Israel’s sin, as is indicated by the whole burnt offering.<sup>19</sup> It is the answer that he will not abandon the people of his name, but that Israel will live.<sup>20</sup>

## **5.2 Jeremiah’s Intercession**

In forestalling Jeremiah’s intercession for Israel, Yahweh educes the names of Moses and

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<sup>18</sup> See 1 Samuel 7:5,11.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding 7:5-11, Keil and Delitzsch note that “Samuel secured . . . for [Israel], through his intercession, the forgiveness of its sin . . . so that the Lord could proceed to vindicate His people’s rights against their foes.” For, “the sacrifice was the substratum for prayer. When Samuel offered it, he cried to the Lord for the children of Israel.” Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, II:73-74.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Samuel 12:22; 12:19 (“pray . . . we will not die” [אֵל-נְמוּתָא]).



Samuel. This informs what is to be known of Jeremiah's intercessions according to what has been given of theirs. The restraint of Jeremiah's intercession is referenced to Jeremiah's prophetic commission and office. Jeremiah acts according to bestowed authority as did Moses and Samuel.<sup>21</sup> For Jeremiah does not speak his own word. He speaks the word of the one having sent him (as had Amos, Jeremiah speaks not *of* himself, but *of* Yahweh<sup>22</sup>). The foundation of Jeremiah's intercession is found in the bestowal of that word (1:9):

וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוָה אֶת־יָדוֹ וַיַּגַּע עַל־פִּי  
 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי הִנֵּה נָתַתִּי דְבָרִי בְּפִיךָ  
 trans.: *Then Yahweh sent forth his hand<sup>23</sup> and touched my mouth,  
 and Yahweh said to me, "See, I have given my words upon your mouth."<sup>24</sup>*

The fact of the words set on his mouth disallows Jeremiah's protest of incapability ("I am a youth!" 1:6). His authority to speak is not referenced to himself in any case. Jeremiah now acts according to authority, by command.<sup>25</sup> He has been consecrated and set apart [קדש]<sup>26</sup> by

<sup>21</sup> This informs how one will understand Yahweh's forestalling of intercession. (Cf. above, 4.3).

<sup>22</sup> See above, 4.1.

<sup>23</sup> Lohse, commenting on  $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho$  / יד, notes that "the hand of Yahweh comes into the life of individuals who are to be taken into his service." The "hand of Yahweh" indicates Yahweh's locating of his incarnational activity to save his people. Lohse: "Indissolubly linked to the Word of Yahweh is the mighty work in history which comes to pass through His hand." Eduard Lohse, " $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho$ ," *TDNT*, IX:427. (Cf. Isaiah 8:11, where Yahweh speaks to Isaiah by means of "the strong hand." Also, 1 Kings 18:46; Ezekiel 1:3, 3:14, etc.)

<sup>24</sup> The word of Yahweh "was to Jeremiah" (1:2, 1:3, 1:4, 1:11, etc.); see above, 3.1.

<sup>25</sup> He acts according to command, mandate [צוה], 1:7; He is sent [שלח], 1:7; he has been appointed, ordained, given over [נתן], 1:5.

<sup>26</sup> Jeremiah 1:5 speaks of his consecration [קדש]. As Thompson notes concerning things (in this case, Jeremiah) which have been set apart [קדש], "Once set apart, these items were for the

Yahweh to stand in Israel as prophet.<sup>27</sup>

Yahweh has set his words on Jeremiah's mouth and promised to be with him. Yahweh will now make himself incarnationally present to Israel by his servant Jeremiah.<sup>28</sup> Yahweh has interposed Jeremiah between Israel and himself. Since the word of Yahweh is specifically with Jeremiah, he is the one who will make entreaty [פָּנַע] to Yahweh of heavenly hosts. Why does Yahweh forestall Jeremiah's intercession? After instructing Jeremiah to "stand in the gate of Yahweh's house" and proclaim to Judah his judgment (7:1-15), Yahweh proceeds (7:16):<sup>29</sup>

וְאַתָּה אֶל-תִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַד-הָעָם הַזֶּה  
וְאֶל-תִּשָּׂא בְעָדָם רִנָּה וּתְפִלָּה  
וְאֶל-תִּפְנֹעַ בִּי כִי-אֵינְנִי שֹׁמֵעַ אֹתָךְ

trans.: *You will not intercede on behalf of this people,*

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sole use of Yahweh, and it was an act of blasphemy to remove them from Yahweh's sovereign right to them." Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 146.

<sup>27</sup> For comparison, Jonah may be considered. Payne points out that since Jonah acts "completely contrary to his prophetic calling . . . [it is] consequently not surprising to find that he displays a reluctance to pray for God's mercy to be shown to others. He does pray. Yet the direction of his prayer is opposite to that of a true prophet. His prayers show a concern only for himself . . . not only does he refuse to be God's messenger, but he also refuses to intercede."

Robin Payne, "The Prophet Jonah: Reluctant Messenger and Intercessor," *The Expository Times* 100 (October 1988-September 1989): 132-133.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., above, 3.2.

Though their reference to Jeremiah's "being" may be somewhat ambiguous (speaking of ontology, or in reference to personhood?), Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard remark,

"As Ezekiel . . . ate the scroll and thus made the divine word a part of his very being, so too the divine word becomes a part of Jeremiah's being."

Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 11.

"Israel" here indicates not a distinction over against Judah (to whom Jeremiah prophesies), but simply the identity of Yahweh's people.

<sup>29</sup> Other instances of Yahweh precluding Jeremiah's intercessions include 11:14 and 14:11.

*nor lift up on their behalf supplication or prayer,  
nor make entreaty before me, for I am not listening to you.*

Certainly Judah's sin is great. Judah has wantonly broken the Commandments and has given sacrifice to Baal and other gods (7:9,18). Judah has done this while pretending that her action of going to the temple and saying, "We are delivered," would spare her Yahweh's justice.

Is this all that is to be said with regard to Yahweh's preclusion of Jeremiah's intercession? Yahweh does speak strong condemnation: "Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place" (7:20). The wrath is caused by Judah spiting him. As Thompson concludes, this passage indicates that "Persistent idolatry could only bring upon Judah, as a consequence, the curses of the covenant."<sup>30</sup> While Judah's idolatry is certainly the cause of Yahweh's wrath, it would seem that more should be said with respect to Yahweh's preclusion of prophetic intercession.<sup>31</sup> After all, Israel has elicited Yahweh's wrath through idolatry before.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> J.A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 284.

<sup>31</sup> Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, for instance, contend that the prohibition of intercession is because "Pagan religious practices had become so widespread that it was pointless to pray any more—the nation had gone too far on the road to apostasy!" Craigie, Kelley, and Drinkard, *Jeremiah 1-25*, 123.

<sup>32</sup> If the point Thompson makes is that of *persistent* idolatry, is it not shown in Hosea's account that even in long and persistent idolatry (1:2, 2:13, 3:1, 8:4, et al.), Yahweh turns his anger away from Israel (14:4)?

Regarding Yahweh's turning of Hosea 14:4 ("For my anger has turned away from them"), Andersen and Freedman comment, "There is no explanation of how God's anger is appeased, except that his ultimate nature is compassion." Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, The Anchor Bible, 24 (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 646.

But there is already an indication of "how God's anger is appeased" at Hosea 12:13: "By a prophet Yahweh brought up Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept." For, as Andersen and Freedman note (referring to Jeremiah 15:1), Samuel and Moses are linked together "precisely in their reputation for interceding effectively with Yahweh for the preservation of Israel." Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 621.

The question of whether specifically Samuel is the referent of "a prophet" (Hosea

When Israel made the molten calf, the prophet interceded and Yahweh repented of the evil due her (Exodus 32:14).<sup>33</sup> Jerusalem's idolatry as seen in the account of Jeremiah stands in the long lineage of Israel's history—a history of Israel turning from Yahweh in idolatry and of Yahweh, in faithfulness to his name, giving restoration back to his name.

Neither will it be enough to say that the cause of intercession's preclusion will be found in Judah's lack of repentance or even lack of potential for repentance.<sup>34</sup> Jeremiah does issue the call for repentance;<sup>35</sup> and Judah's refusal to turn back does indeed bring Yahweh's wrath. But as the prayer of Lamentations demonstrates, in the end Judah is entirely unable to turn back. Jerusalem's call for repentance—"Let us turn back [שוב] to Yahweh" (Lamentations 3:40)—is ultimately met with the prayer recognizing that she cannot turn back (Lamentations 5:21):

"You turn us back [שוב], O Yahweh, to yourself,  
then we will be turned back [שוב]."

Yahweh bestows upon Jerusalem the repentance she cannot accomplish for herself. It

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12:13b), as argued by Andersen and Freedman, is here not determinative. Surely it can be understood to extend to the lineage of prophets, especially in light of Yahweh's promise to Moses of "a prophet like you" (Deuteronomy 18:18). That promise, speaking typologically of the prophetic office, would hardly need to find "a prophet" (Hosea 12:13b) confined to a certain name, whether Samuel, Elijah, or another. As Craigie notes, "The singular (*a prophet*) is a collective form indicating a succession of prophets." Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 262.

This understanding (of Hosea 12:13) would correspond to Jeremiah 7:25, which speaks of the continuing lineage of *all* the prophets sent to preserve Israel:

"Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all my servants the prophets, daily rising early to send [them]."

<sup>33</sup> Exodus 32:1-14. For Yahweh's repentance, see above, 4.2.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, for instance, states that the passage is possibly "intended to emphasize that the possibility of repentance was so remote that prayer would no longer avail." Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 284.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., 7:3: "Amend your ways."

will be accomplished not *by* Jerusalem, but *for* Jerusalem. Repentance now stands not as the cause of Yahweh's gracious action of deliverance but the result.<sup>36</sup> Jerusalem's deliverance and repentance is of one piece, and it is all bestowed by Yahweh.<sup>37</sup> The gift is bestowed by means of Yahweh's deliverance and preservation and by the proclamation of that deliverance. All of this, both the deliverance and the proclamation, is accomplished through the prophet.<sup>38</sup>

Judah's repentance is not the cause of Yahweh's deliverance but the result. Judah's actions bring only the wrath of Yahweh. Observation of Judah's action—quite apart from her deliverance, toward which she is passive—will explain only her condemnation. The fact of the prophet's intercession for Judah will not be properly understood by examining that which is observable about Judah. The prophet's intercession falls within the commission given to him by

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<sup>36</sup> Commenting on צוּר, Würthwein, notes that "Conversion is the consequence, not the presupposition, of deliverance." Würthwein says that Jeremiah "no longer expects from men a comprehensive renewing of the people. He expects this only from God, who will write His Law on the people's hearts (31:33)." E. Würthwein, "μετανοεω, μετανοια," *TDNT*, IV:987.

<sup>37</sup> This is brought forward to its completion in the words of Peter's proclamation to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 5:31):

"God has exalted [Jesus] to His right hand, Prince and Savior, to give [διδουμι] repentance [μετανοια] to Israel and forgiveness of sins."

Then comes the completion in its totality, its full distribution, as testified by the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:18):

"Then to the Gentiles also God has given [διδουμι] repentance [μετανοια] to life."

<sup>38</sup> As at Hosea 12:13 (see note 37 above). Also see above, 3.1, where the prophet Moses is set to deliver [יִצְאֵ] Israel.

The point is not that the prophet only, to the exclusion of the king and the priest, accomplishes the deliverance and preservation of Yahweh's people. Rather that while the king delivers Israel by the administration of his throne, and the priest by the administration of the Ark of the Covenant and Tabernacle/Temple, both king and priest find their authority from the word of the prophet.

Yahweh.<sup>39</sup> Because intercession is proper to the prophetic office, the prophetic intercession (whether upheld or withheld by Yahweh) will be understood with reference to Yahweh who has established the prophet in his office. The prophetic office and its commission is determined by Yahweh. When the prophet intercedes or when that intercession is withheld, as also when the prophet speaks the word or when that word is withheld,<sup>40</sup> it is all understood according to the determination (the will or counsel [עצרה]) of Yahweh.

In Lamentations, Yahweh sends all things to Judah by his word. Both the good and the evil are according to the ordering [צורה] established by him (Lamentations 3:37-38):

Who is this? He speaks and it happens! Has not the Lord [אדני]<sup>41</sup> ordained [צורה] it? From the mouth of the Most High [עליון],<sup>42</sup> do not [both] the good and the

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<sup>39</sup> His commission to deliver (see above, 3.1) and preserve Israel (e.g., Hosea 12:13, see above, note 32).

<sup>40</sup> Cf., 1 Samuel 3:1, 28:6; Amos 8:12; Ezekiel 7:26.

<sup>41</sup> Concerning the title אדני, see above, section 4.2 and 3.3.

<sup>42</sup> עליון here refers to God in “his heavenly dwelling.” This emphasizes “the universal power of God.” See G. Wehmeier, “עלה,” *TLOT*, II:890-893.

The force of the title would be this: Judah must know that all things are under the purview of Yahweh; the good she receives as also the evil. Nothing is by happenstance of earthly accidents, it is all from the mouth of עליון. Keil and Delitzsch observe that this passage is to lead Judah

to see that the weight of sorrow under which they are sighing has been sent from the Lord as a chastisement for their sins . . . that every wrong committed upon earth is under the divine control, and generally that nothing happens without God’s permission; hence man ought not to mourn over the suffering that befalls him, but rather over his sins.

Keil and Delitzsch, “*Jeremiah, Lamentations*,” 417.

Keil and Delitzsch speak of nothing happening “without God’s permission.” It should probably be noted that Lamentations does not leave God quite so passive. It is not a matter of God *allowing* (i.e., permission), but of God (אדני, עליון) ordaining, commanding [צורה]. Cf., Jeremiah 32:42. (And Keil and Delitzsch do also observe that the “sorrow has been sent from

evil [רעה] go forth?<sup>43</sup>

That which comes to Judah, whether the good or the evil, whether prophetic intercession or withheld intercession, will be traced back to the council of Yahweh. For the will and counsel of Yahweh is declared and ordained [צוה] at the council.

The revelation of the council is unknowable to Israel apart from the prophet of Yahweh.<sup>44</sup> Since the prophet is to be known as Yahweh's servant [עבד] from the framework of the council, the false prophets are circumscribed by Yahweh's charge that they do not have a place at the council (Jeremiah 23:18a, 23:22a):<sup>45</sup>

כִּי מִי עָמַד בְּסוּד יְהוָה  
וַיִּרְא וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶת־דְּבָרָיו...  
... וְאִם־עָמְדוּ בְּסוּדַי וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ דְבָרַי אֶת־עַמִּי  
וַיִּשְׁבוּ מִדֶּרְכָם הָרַע

trans.: *For who [i.e., what prophet] has stood in the council of Yahweh,  
and has seen and heard his word?  
. . . For if they had stood in my council  
and had caused my people to hear my words  
then they would have caused them to turn back from their evil way.*

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the Lord.”)

<sup>43</sup> Concerning the רעה, see above, 4.2.

<sup>44</sup> Kingsbury states that one of the common elements of the revealed council is the presence of the prophetic office (the others: Yahweh as king, sitting on a throne; heavenly creatures assembled around Yahweh; at the time of a feast or festival). Kingsbury does note that Job is “one nonprophetic picture of the council of Yahweh.” (But the question of Job may be relative to the dating of Job, since Abraham is the first prophet named and Job would belong to patriarchal, pre-Mosaic, times.) Edwin C. Kingsbury, “The Prophets and the Council of Yahweh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXIII (1964): 284.

<sup>45</sup> Concerning עבד, see above, 4.2, notes 21 and 22.

The prophet of Yahweh stands [עמד] in Yahweh's council.<sup>46</sup> The verb עמד locates the prophet as one stationed before Yahweh in order to stand between Yahweh and Israel as the mediator and advocate.<sup>47</sup>

As James Ross observes, "the prophets . . . claimed that their authority was that of one sent by Yahweh or from his council."<sup>48</sup> The council is the locus where Yahweh decrees his will or counsel. There the word out of his mouth is "seen and heard" (Jeremiah 23:18). The prophet is stationed in the council and also is sent to Israel. He stands as the incarnational delivery point of the council's decree to Israel.

In this way the question of why Jeremiah's intercession is forestalled is ultimately left in the mystery of the council. It is true that Judah deserves no intercession, for repentance has not

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<sup>46</sup> Micaiah is made privy to the council, and he reveals that all the hosts of heaven are standing [עמד] on the right and on the left of Yahweh (2 Chronicles 18:18). Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah when he stands [עמד] at the face of Yahweh (Genesis 18:22). Moses stands [עמד] before Yahweh (Deuteronomy 4:10). Elijah is told to stand [עמד] before Yahweh on the mountain (1 Kings 19).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 5:5, where Moses stands between Yahweh and people.

There is a consonance of "in the council" [בסוד] and "at the face" [לפני], where לפני (as when the question is whether or not Judah will be able to "see the face" of Joseph in Egypt, Genesis 43:3,5) "refers to audiences with the great." See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 420.

As noted by van der Woude, פניהם speaks "in reference to influential persons also 'to be admitted to audience' . . . 'to be admitted to court.'" A.S. van der Woude, "פניהם," *TLOT*, II:1001.

<sup>48</sup> James F. Ross, "The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger," in *Prophecy in Israel*, ed. David L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 118.

Speaking of Jeremiah, Ross notes that he:

"Claims that his ultimate authority as God's messenger is to be found at the highest level, in the divine council itself. He has heard words and seen visions; his is under constraint to make the people hearken, to carry out the decision of the *sod*."

Ross, "The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger," 116.



ensued. But those facts are hardly exceptional in Israel's history. Finally all that can be said with certainty is that Yahweh's will and counsel [עצה] is that his people Israel be saved. How this salvation is actually worked out is often indeterminable to earthly observation. Yahweh's intention that Israel be saved is shrouded in mystery. But Yahweh reveals his will from the council by the instrumentality of the prophet. The prophet proclaims that Yahweh's name will be upheld, not abandoned.<sup>49</sup> And it is Israel (Judah) who bears his name.<sup>50</sup>

### 5.3 Conclusion

In the case of Jeremiah, the accounts of intercession (both when intercession is carried forward and when it is forestalled) are many (especially if Lamentations is to be considered). This thesis has examined only a small portion.<sup>51</sup> The question of intercession forestalled is covered in this thesis only at the point of Jeremiah 7:16: "You will not intercede on behalf of this people."<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the negative evidence serves to stress the point that Yahweh has

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<sup>49</sup> This counsel of Yahweh is made known in the hearing [שמע] of his word. This is opposite the sin of Israel. The sin is given definition by Yahweh's indictment (Jeremiah 7:24):  
"Yet they did not hear [שמע] and they did not incline their ear [to my counsel],  
but they walked in the counsels [עצה] [of] the stubbornness of their evil hearts...."  
Cf., above, 3.4, note 62.

<sup>50</sup> See above, 3.2. Cf., Jeremiah 7:23: [Yahweh said,] "Hear my voice, and I will be your God, and you will be my people."

<sup>51</sup> Rhodes finds the evidence of intercession so abundant that he breaks it down topically into two categories: "negative evidence" (when Jeremiah is forbidden by Yahweh to intercede for the people) and "positive evidence" (where Jeremiah is found in the act of intercession). Rhodes, "Israel's prophets as Intercessors": 118.

<sup>52</sup> See above, 5.1. Other instances of Jeremiah's intercession withheld include 11:14; 14:11; and, indirectly, 15:1. Cf. above, 4.2, where, upon interceding after the first two visions, Amos does not intercede after the third.

established the prophet as intercessor and he does heed the prophet's intercession. It is by virtue of that fact that Yahweh would have Jeremiah refrain from intercession at particular times.<sup>53</sup> With the preclusion of intercession comes the recognition that Yahweh has already decreed his determination, his counsel [עצרה]—and the prophet is the commissioned revealer appointed to dispense that counsel.<sup>54</sup> That counsel (of the council) is left concealed except to the extent that Yahweh will cause it to be revealed.<sup>55</sup> It is left in mystery that within history Yahweh does at times send forth good, at times evil.<sup>56</sup> But it is not left in mystery that all of it (the good and also the evil) is toward the ultimate accomplishment of the unfolding of his name, which is the

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<sup>53</sup> For instance, the preclusion of intercession at Jeremiah 11:14 might be traced to 11:11 and 11:17 (“Yahweh of hosts . . . has pronounced [רברך, piel perfect] against you evil [רעה]”).

<sup>54</sup> As noted above (4.3, see note 39), Shalom Paul, with regard to Amos's absence of intercession: “the die is cast . . . the divine decree is now final and absolute and precludes any possibility of prophetic action.”

<sup>55</sup> Possibly for this reason סוד is found in some translations not as “council” but “secret” (e.g., Amos 3:7: NKJV, “secret”; NIV, “plan”). Nevertheless, in the context of the prophetic office this abstraction of סוד away from the concrete reality of a heavenly council (or an earthly council, depending on setting) toward a less tangible “secret” or “plan” might be considered in light of the verb at Jeremiah 23:18,22 where the prophet *stands* [עמד] in the council [סוד]. This would seemingly be evident in the aforementioned NKJV and NIV, since both translate סוד at Jeremiah 23 with *council*).

סוד is never brought across with *μυστηριον* by the LXX. At Jeremiah 23 is it *υποστασις*. According to Koster, *υποστασις* is “‘the underlying reality behind something’ . . . the ‘plan’ or ‘purpose’ or as ‘that which endures,’ enclosed in God.” Helmut Koster, “υποστασις,” *TDNT*, VIII:582̄. Brown maintains that סוד's semantic area includes “secret.” Raymond E. Brown, “The Pre-Christian Semitic Concept of ‘Mystery,’” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 20 (1958): 418.

<sup>56</sup> Concerning Amos, Rhodes comments:  
 “Within *chronos* there are *kairoi* of possible forgiveness, when intercession to avert destruction is in order. Within *chronos* there are also *kairoi* of certain judgment, when some kinds of intercession are inappropriate.”  
 Rhodes, “Israel's Prophets as Intercessors,” 117.

salvation of his people.

Sent to Judah as prophet, as Yahweh's servant, Jeremiah is the revealer *to* Judah of the council's decrees and of Yahweh's word. But he stands also as the advocate *for* Judah to entreat on her behalf, in her stead, before of Yahweh.<sup>57</sup> Jeremiah will entreat for vindication as one authorized by a word having been placed on his mouth. That word placed on the mouth has foundational implications for Jeremiah. Yahweh makes himself incarnationally present to Judah by Jeremiah. But Judah's self-counsel is her yearning after idols, and the word of Yahweh contradicts that counsel. Judah desires no forgiveness; she will not and cannot repent. Jeremiah is vulnerable over against Judah because he bears the word, and Judah does not desire the word on his mouth. In the midst of Judah he stands as "a lamb led to slaughter," subject to the "devised plots" against him. Judah has forgotten the covenant to which Jeremiah calls upon Judah to return; Judah also wants to forget Jeremiah. Judah wants him "cut-off from the land of the living" so that there is "no more remembrance of his name."<sup>58</sup> The prophet is set in vulnerability before the priest of the temple to be beaten and humiliated.<sup>59</sup>

If the word placed on his mouth has implications for Jeremiah, the implications for Judah are especially profound. Yahweh has determined to bring forth the fullness of his strength in the salvation of his people. He chooses to do this through the weakness and vulnerability of the

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<sup>57</sup> Commenting on the laments, Rhodes notes that "Jeremiah so identifies with his people that he prays vicariously: 'Correct me, Yahweh, in justice; not in anger, lest you bring me to nought.'" Rhodes, "Israel's Prophets as Intercessors," 119.

<sup>58</sup> Jeremiah 11:19.

<sup>59</sup> Jeremiah 20:1-2. At 26:14 Jeremiah is subject to the power of the princes and the people: "I am in your hand."

prophet. Precisely in Yahweh's self-chosen weakness—in the incarnational delivery of the word, in the vulnerability of Jeremiah—Judah is given to find her salvation. For the one sent by Yahweh as Judah's advocate will intercede [פָּנֵעַ] on her behalf. He will speak to Yahweh by the authority of the words Yahweh has placed on his mouth. Yahweh will hear; Judah will be restored in the holy Name.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For example, when Jeremiah makes entreaty, expressing the futility of Judah's gods which "are not gods" (16:19), Yahweh names himself as Judah's God: "They will know that my name is Yahweh." (16:21) Cf. above, note 15.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 Summary

The objective of this thesis has been to probe the narrow subject of prophetic intercession in such a way that it may inform the wider subject of the prophetic office. The fact that the prophet is appointed to speak for Yahweh to Israel is beyond dispute. But the prophetic office is more than one-dimensional. The coterminous fact that the prophet speaks for Israel to Yahweh reveals much about the prophetic office and about how Yahweh preserves the people of his name. Toward that understanding, this thesis has examined the intercession of certain prophets, beginning with Abraham.

Yahweh identifies Abraham as prophet to Abimelech. Abraham is subject to Abimelech even to the point of peril by virtue of Abimelech's power as king, and he is especially jeopardized by his own sin against Abimelech. Nevertheless, Abimelech will find his salvation through the prophetic intercession of Abraham. This is established by Yahweh's words to Abimelech. Abraham will intercede [פּלִל] on behalf [בְּעַד] of Abimelech. Abimelech is saved due to Abraham's intercession as Yahweh's verdict is reversed from death to life. King Abimelech is to know that even though Abraham stands before him in weakness and humility, it is Abraham alone who will intercede to Yahweh on his behalf.

Moses is called to deliver Yahweh's people. Moses is commissioned [שְׁלַח] by Yahweh to "Bring out [יֵצֵא] my people." This is Yahweh's accomplishment of his promise to deliver [נִצֵּל] his people. Yahweh bestows his name [יְהוָה] and promises to be with Moses. He sends

Moses to Israel and Pharaoh as one to act by authority. Moses will speak the words and accomplish the action of Yahweh's gracious deliverance. He intercedes [פלל], entreats [חלה], and makes supplication [עחר]. He pleads Israel's case and stands before Yahweh [את־פני יהוה] as Israel's advocate. With respect to Lord Yahweh [אדני יהוה], Moses stands as commissioned servant [עבד], so that what he speaks is proper to his bestowed office. Yahweh has placed his words on Moses' mouth, and by those words he institutes prophetic salvation for the people of his name (Deuteronomy 18:18): "I will raise up . . . a prophet like [Moses] and I will give my words into his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him."

Amos is stationed in the council of Lord Yahweh [אדני יהוה].<sup>1</sup> He is also sent to Israel as Yahweh's servant to reveal his word. When Amos sees the decreed judgment, he pleads, "Forgive," "Stop." He appeals for Yahweh's repentance, for his reversal. Israel's salvation is found in Yahweh's response to this prophetic intercession. Amos does not prophesy of his own accord. He prophesies by the authority of his call and of the name of Yahweh. He prophesies by virtue of having been given the visions (he is "Seer") by Yahweh. He speaks not his own word but the word of Yahweh. As such, Amos stands in weakness over against the king and the priest, even though they are illegitimate (for the king and the priest have set themselves in opposition to the word of Yahweh). By Yahweh's institution the intercession for Israel's survival will issue from a voice vulnerable to Israel's evil. But Yahweh hears the voice of Amos and he repents. Israel is to hear the voice of Amos announcing Yahweh's repentance and forgiveness.

Jeremiah, like Amos, stands in the council of Yahweh. He is positioned between

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<sup>1</sup> See above, 4.2. Also 5.2., especially footnotes 46 and 47.

Yahweh and Israel (Judah) as intercessor and advocate. When he refers to the prophets of the lie, Jeremiah speaks of those who have not stood in the council and who do not have the word.<sup>2</sup> The prophet of Yahweh is the one with the word.<sup>3</sup> Yahweh has revealed his counsel to that prophet, and urgent entreaty to Yahweh on behalf of Israel is expectable from that prophet. Because Jeremiah is the bearer of the word (his word is Yahweh's word), and because that word is contradicted by the princes and the priest, Jeremiah is positioned against their strength "as a lamb led to slaughter."<sup>4</sup> But Yahweh chooses to make himself known in weakness, and he is with Jeremiah.<sup>5</sup> Judah is to know that Yahweh is accomplishing the salvation of his people by the instrumentality of Jeremiah. Yahweh is restoring Judah to the holy Name by Jeremiah.

## **6.2 Christological Implications**

In observing texts for the prophets Abraham, Moses, Amos, and Jeremiah (and tangentially Samuel), this survey is less than comprehensive. Other prophets may also be considered, such as Elijah, Elisha, Habakkuk, and Isaiah. The texts surveyed serve to provide a view into the prophetic office. Probing the intercessions of the prophets informs our understanding of the prophetic office and its authority to bear Yahweh's word. The concern is more than just historical because the word of Yahweh is eternal. What is said of the prophet will have implications for what is understood of the word and its accomplishment throughout all of

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<sup>2</sup> See above, 5.2.

<sup>3</sup> See above, 5.1; Jeremiah 1:4,11, et al.

<sup>4</sup> See above, 5.3.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Jeremiah 1:8.

history.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the consummation of the prophetic lineage (Hebrews 1:1-2, NKJV):

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*.”

What Yahweh instituted by Moses has been brought forward to Jesus. It has been fully accomplished here on earth and taken up into heaven (Hebrews 1:3).<sup>6</sup> All that Jesus does will be seen in the light of Yahweh’s institution of the prophetic lineage when he promised Moses: “I will raise up a prophet from among their brothers like you, and I will give my words into his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him.”<sup>7</sup> God has raised up Jesus from among “their brothers” (as demonstrated by the genealogies of Matthew 1 and Luke 3) and he now speaks by him. The word of Yahweh “came” to the prophets; it was on their mouth and was delivered by their voice. With Jesus it is that and much more. If the word was with the prophet, with Jesus it is an identity; he *is* the Word.

As the prophet stood before Yahweh, now He has taken his place (Ephesians 1:20;

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<sup>6</sup> Jesus is the *eternal* Word, the Alpha and the Omega extending over all history. With regard to Old Testament Christology, should it not be said that what Jesus accomplished has been taken up into eternity and is projected back to Moses (and to the entire history of Israel). The full, final salvation of the eternal Israel is the Incarnational deliverance of the cross. It is the atonement made for all sins. The Exodus deliverance is the particular incarnational delivery (given instrumentally through Moses to the Israel of that generation) of the redemption accomplished on the cross.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 18:18. This may be compared to Jesus’ prayer to his Father (Hebrews 2:12) in which he speaks of his brothers: “I will proclaim your name [O Father,] to my brothers, in the midst of the congregation.”

The prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 is commented on above, 3.4 (footnote 100) and 5.2 (footnote 32).



Revelation 5:13).<sup>8</sup> Questions such as whether the prophet is to be defined primarily as a speaker of the word, or also as an intercessor, may be subsumed to the recognition that the Prophet Jesus is stationed at the heavenly throne (Hebrews 10:12). Now the revelation of his person provides all definition. In him is found both the proclamation of the word and its intercession. Even as the prophet prayed for Israel, now He stands as the Advocate for all sinners (1 John 2:1-2). He is the intercessor for the people of his name (Romans 8:34). For his blood sacrifice has obtained the eternal redemption for sins (Hebrews 9:12).

Now he is stationed in his church in the “weakness” of the proclaimed Word and the Sacraments.<sup>9</sup> At his name the new Israel, the church, is given to know her salvation. As said by Sasse, this “is the secret of the church’s preservation,” that Jesus “prays for the preservation of the church. And that prayer is heard.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See above, 5.2, also 3.3.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed the Word and Sacraments are not weak. As Luther says of Holy Baptism, it is “a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost.” Luther, “The Small Catechism,” in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 551.

At the same time Holy Baptism has the appearance of weakness. In the world it is viewed as “ordinary” water. Luther points out that “the devil is busy to delude us with false appearances, and lead us away from the work of God to our own works.” Because of this delusion, sinful reason judges Baptism to be weak. As Luther states it, “because Baptism does not shine like the works which we do, it is to be esteemed as nothing [by sinful reason].” Luther, “The Large Catechism,” in *Concordia Triglotta*, 735. (Cf. above, 3.4, footnote 88.)

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Sasse, “Jesus Intercedes for His Church,” in *We Confess the Church*, trans. Norman Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 14.

Sasse here speaks specifically of Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” of John 17, saying, “But this one prayer is prayed by the eternal Son to the Father. He, the High Priest, utters it for His church.”

Nevertheless, the “High Priestly” title surely does not need to speak of Jesus as High Priest to the exclusion of his prophetic office. This is especially true since it is the prophetic word that instituted the priestly office. In the Incarnation, can these offices be isolated anymore anyway? They are all found in the Man, Christ Jesus.

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