The Iceberg Effect: The Previously Unrecognized Role of Conventional Figures of Speech and Other Commonplaces in Biblical Depictions of God's Operation via Agents, and Their English Translation

*Paper presented to the SBL "Metaphor Theory and the Hebrew Bible" section (11/24/15)*[1]

> Even in modern society . . . there exist experiences and resources
> which can be used sensitively to explain features of Old Testament
> narrative that are at first sight puzzling and alien.
> —J. W. Rogerson ("Anthropology and the OT," *ABD*)

Introduction

This paper's thematic metaphoric vehicle is an *iceberg*. Famously, more of an iceberg's mass lies beneath the water's surface than is visible above the surface.

My first assertion: This initial presentation will not prove my thesis to your satisfaction; there are too many steps involved, each one of which could be the subject of an academic paper. Nevertheless, I will present a grand overview of my argument, while referring you to the detailed discussion found in the footnotes and appendixes, which taken together is six times bigger. In that sense, this overview is the proverbial tip of the iceberg.
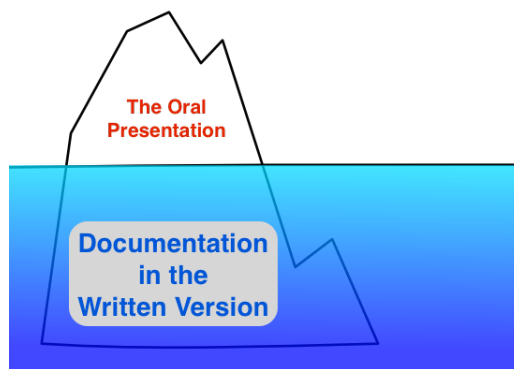
I will employ concepts from the field of linguistics to illuminate a biblical motif that is well known but commonly viewed as puzzling or even bizarre. The problem statement was captured well by Frank Polak in a 1997 article, as follows:

> In some tales of the Hebrew Bible, the hero is addressed simultaneously by the super-human messenger of *Yhwh* (that is to say, the angel) and by his divine sovereign. . . . The co-occurrence of two speakers with one message seems paradoxical and even contradictory: if the angel is there, why should the deity be present, and if God is speaking, what is the need for the messenger?

In order to solve this problem decisively, we must begin by exploring a more general motif: God operates via agents to interact with humankind.[2] By the term "agent" I mean someone who *represents* or *stands in the place of* another party, who in turn is known as the "principal."[3] I will focus on the Bible's narrative portions, which present us with a wide range of agents of Israel's God—that is, of characters and groups that this deity is said to rely upon, so as to further the divine plan.[4] This paper will consider what applies

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[2] Depicting a recourse to agents is part of the Bible's characterization of its deity, which tends to be oblique. As Amelia Devin Freedman observes in her *God as an Absent Character in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Literary-Theological Study* (NY: Peter Lang, 2005), "While there can be no question that the Hebrew Bible as a whole is centered on God and God's relations with Israel, God appears in most biblical stories only indirectly" (p. 3). That is, God often enters the narrative via only the narrator's or a character's utterances about the deity. Freedman notes that some of those characters are God's agents.

[3] In other words, a *principal* is someone who delegates a task or role to an *agent*.

The Biblical Hebrew lexicon lacks a general term that is equivalent to "principal" in the sense used here. The participle *šoleiaḥ* is used once in narrative as a substantive to designate the "sender" of someone on an errand (2 Sam 24:13 // 1 Chr 21:12; cf. Prov 10:26; 22:21; 25:13; 26:6; I thank Frank Polak for calling my attention to this usage). As for "agent," the basic-level designation is the referentially relational noun *'iš*; see below, note 28.

In the present paper, I couch my motif of interest with the verb "operates" rather than "employs" so as to include agents who are unaware of their part in the divine plan (e.g., Sennacherib), and to include short-term tasks as well as ongoing agency roles.

[4] In narrative passages, God's various agents include: Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the "Judges," Samuel; the anointed kings; Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, and other prophets; the priesthood; the Levites; the captain of Adonai's host; the *mašḥit* ("Destroyer") who strikes down the Egyptian first-born; the people Israel; Gabriel; *mal'ak*; *'iš*; *'iš 'elohim*; *ruaḥ šeqer*; *ruaḥ ra'ah*; *ha-śaṭan*. This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

For present purposes I limit my consideration to narrative portions of the Bible in order not to confuse *narrative* conventions with *poetic* ones. I have also restricted my investigation to the Masoretic Text (MT)—despite the fact that in certain passages, some scholars might reject the MT's reading in favor of what is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls or Samaritan versions, or in the ancient translations. I am interested in how MT might make sense on its own terms. Regarding the ancient translations, see the "translation" section of this paper (below, n. 40).

to all types of agents, before focusing in particular on those who are *sent on a mission*, whom I shall refer to as "messengers."[5]

Methodology

In this paper, I am interested specifically in the text's "plain sense"—that is, a reading that is bound by considerations of grammar, syntax, and context.[6] In other words: how people in ancient Israel would have normally used language to communicate with each other.[7]

To decode a typical utterance's plain sense, I must read it in light of *commonplaces*—the cultural knowledge that normally goes without saying.[8] The utterance itself is just the tip of the iceberg.

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[5] In analyzing the linguistic usage related to messengers, I do not restrict myself to instances of the term *mal'ak*, which is the standard term for that role. Messengers are often designated via other terms, such as *'iš* or *'ebed* or *na'ar*—and sometimes their presence is merely implied, without a substantive.

[6] For a sophisticated categorization of the many types of context, see Nicolai Winther-Nielsen, "Tracking the World of Judges: The Use of Contextual Resources in Narration and Conversation," *SEE-J Hiphil* 2 (2005). According to his categorization, the present paper focuses on context types IIc (frame) and IId′ (language).

[7] This desire to construe the biblical text in terms of how language normally works is what warrants my appeal to the insights of linguistics—in particular the fields of cognitive linguistics (of the use-oriented variety), communication-oriented linguistics, and pragmatics. Here I concur with Stephen Shead, who argues that precisely because we have no direct access to native speakers of biblical Hebrew, biblical scholars should view cognitive perspectives as a vital "recent resource that relates to the minds of the speakers rather than to the texts themselves" (*Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew: Exploring Lexical Semantics* [Boston: Brill, 2011], p. 182). On the need to explore the cognitive underpinnings of language use, see also Ellen van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009], pp. 18–19, 54–55, 105; Pierre van Hecke, *From Linguistics to Hermeneutics: A Functional and Cognitive Approah to Job 12–14* (Boston: Brill, 2011), Prolegomena.

Any reconstruction of ancient "reading" conventions is necessarily far from perfect, and certainty will surely elude us. As Robert Holmstedt has cautioned, "for ancient Hebrew, we'll never know how close we've come" ("Issues in the Linguistic Analysis of a Dead Language, with Particular Reference to Ancient Hebrew," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, Vol. 6, Art. 11 [2006]: 2–21; here 21).

[8] I have adopted the term "commonplaces" from Hanne Løland Levinson's monograph *Silent or Salient Gender* (Tübingen: Mohr Sieback, 2008). She cites Max Black for the 1962 coinage
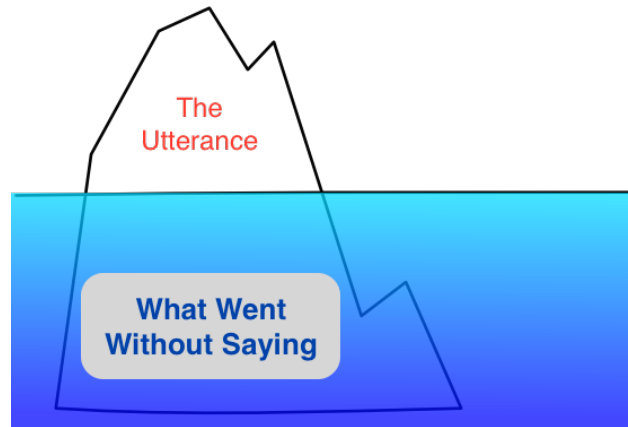
Consequently, when the biblical text invokes the motif of "God operates via agents," I construe it as *by default* using the same protocols and linguistic conventions that applied to the use of agents in everyday ancient Israelite society.[9] (This might seem like an obvious metaphoric transfer to you, but no other modern scholar seems to have done it that way.)

In my original proposal for this paper, I called the motif that "God operates via agents" a *metaphor*. But today, rather than engage the vexing scholarly debate about whether and how god-language is indeed metaphoric, I prefer to focus on *how the Bible depicts God's use of agents*. Consequently, this presentation speaks in terms of "motif" rather than "metaphor."[10]

This is yet another iceberg. Scholars have not yet taken adequate account of what lies beneath the surface of this motif—in particular, the associated concepts and linguistic usages.

"associated commonplaces," to refer to the complex of "readily and freely evoked" associations that members of a given society hold in common about a metaphor's figurative vehicle.

[9] By "default" I mean: unless there is good reason to think that the ancient audience would have understood the divine realm to operate differently from the human realm. See Appendix 1.

My presumption—that the text's composers expected its ancient audience to construe the motif of interest *by default* in terms of their society's commonplaces about agents—is meant to be an informal way of stating that any narrative depiction of agency relies upon a particular *semantic frame* that conditions (or contextualizes) the meaning of the words in that utterance. Stephen Shead describes a frame as "a rich, *structured* conceptual framework, arising from life experience" (p. 49; emphasis in original). Charles Fillmore and colleagues have defined semantic frames more formally as "schematic representations of the conceptual structures and patterns of belief, practices, institutions, images, etc. that provide a foundation for meaningful interaction in a given speech community" (as cited by Shead, p. 108).

[10] On this motif's nature as a metaphor, see Appendix 2.

"God operates via agents"

MOTIF

Linguistic Usages

Underlying Concepts
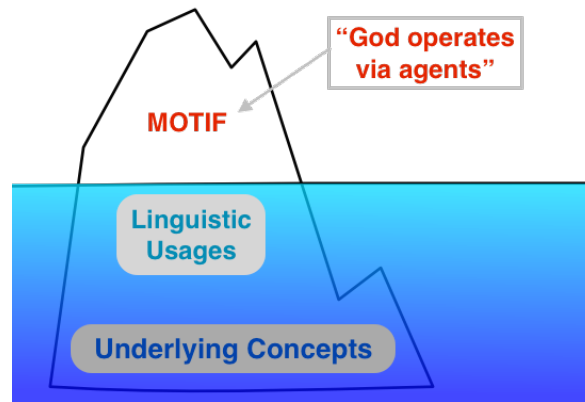
Outline

I am about to explicate the concepts that underlie the agency motif. I will show how certain linguistic usages arise from those underlying concepts. In particular, I will spotlight two linguistic usages that prior biblical scholarship seems to have overlooked. Both are *narrative conventions* for describing an agency procedure. To those two conventions I will add a list of other cultural commonplaces that have been more widely recognized—yet rarely applied to this motif. Then I will analyze one of the most famous biblical accounts of God's recourse to agents, to demonstrate what difference it makes when we construe it in light of the listed commonplaces. Next I will discuss the findings of that demonstration. Finally, I will touch upon the challenge faced in rendering this motif into English, and upon two main strategies for addressing it.

The Nature of the Agency Motif

Now, underlying a depiction of *anyone* as "operating via agents" are two special conceptual aspects, both of which are culturally supported. The first of these basic concepts consists of *conceptual scripts about agency*.[11] A "script" conditions what participants both do and say at each stage in a frequently recurring sequence of events.

The second basic concept is the very notion that, under certain circumstances, *one party can represent another party*, both legally and emotionally. Because that idea treats the two parties as to some extent *referentially identical*, this cognitive model is a metonymy: +AGENT FOR PRINCIPAL+. Mentally, it maps from "principal" to "agent" within the same conceptual domain of PERSONS.

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[11] By "script" I mean the culturally defined, structured set of information that characterizes a frequently recurring sequence of events. A script conditions what the participants do and say at each stage, by proffering certain expected procedures and protocols. Scripts enable us to quickly accomplish ordinary things that involve other people.

This kind of metonymy is an ongoing conceptualization that licenses actions with real consequences for how we conduct ourselves in society. It leverages our capabilities. It allows us to participate even when we are physically remote. It is quite literally a "far-reaching" notion. Of course, normally that concept of agency seems completely natural to us, presumably because it fits the *representational* manner in which the human mind processes reality.[12]

(Here is what our iceberg looks like now, with concepts that underlie our motif.)
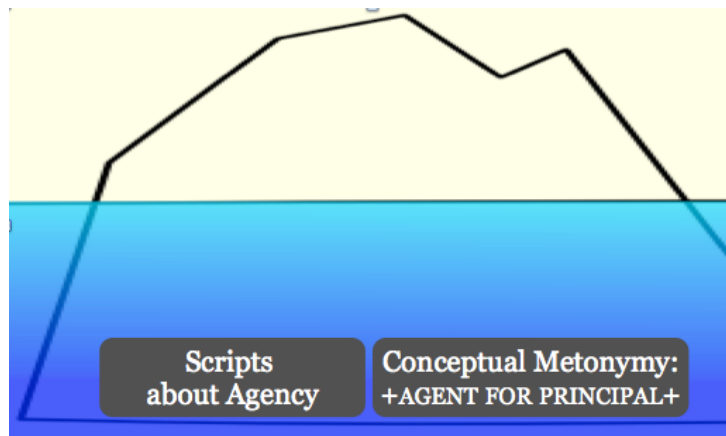
Now, each of these two concepts then licenses a particular *figure of speech* as conventional—that is, as a commonplace when depicting an agency situation.

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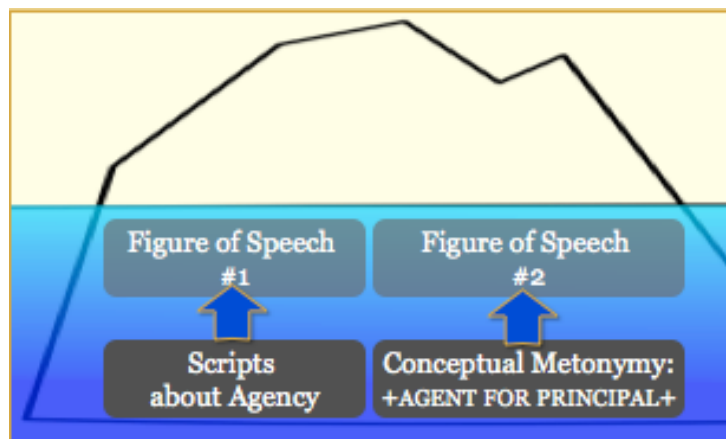
[12] On linguistic views of metonymy, see Appendix 3; see also Kevin Chau, "Metaphor's Forgotten Brother: A Survey of Metonymy in Biblical Hebrew Poetry," *Journal for Semitics* 23/2i [2014]: 633–52; B. Nerlich and D. D. Clarke, "Serial Metonymy: A Reference-based Study of Polysemisation," *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2/2 (2001): 245–72, esp. pp. 250–56.

Scripts about agency license our speaking about the agency process via *ellipsis*. For example, I can say to you, "A messenger knocked on my hotel door last night and handed me a letter from the Queen!" and you immediately learn a lot *in addition* to what I have told you—about the many steps involved in how that messenger got to be standing at the door. All of that is beneath the surface. All of that goes without saying. All of that is understood because of the cultural knowledge encoded in the messaging script.[13]

For its part, the underlying conceptual metonymy of +AGENT FOR PRINCIPAL+ licenses certain customary *ways of referring to* principals and their agents. Specifically, under certain conditions one can speak about an agent *in terms of* the principal—and still be readily understood. To play with my previous example, I could say to you:

> "**The Queen** contacted me last night! I was reading, when I heard a knock on my door. I cracked it open—and saw **a messenger** standing there."

The party that actually "contacted" me was the messenger, but I say that it was "the Queen" in order to succinctly convey on whose behalf that messenger was acting. As you probably know, that figure of speech is called *metonymy*. Its hallmark is a discontinuity in the participant references: when you encounter the word "messenger," it prompts your mind to re-analyze what I meant previously when I mentioned "the Queen."

Conventional metonyms may not only precede a speaker's mention of the agent but also follow it.[14]

(Here is what our iceberg looks like now, showing the licensed linguistic usages.)

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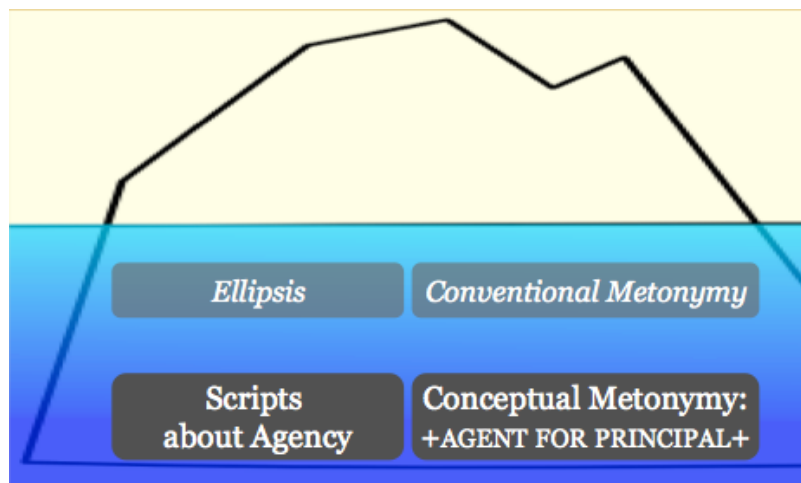
[13] On scripts from a cognitive perspective, see the summary in ch. 5 of Ungerer and Schmid.

[14] See the baseball example in Appendix 3.

Both figures of speech are attractive due to their linguistic efficiency: they convey information about the agency situation without having to spell it out. Moreover, they let the speaker frame our view of the situation by mentioning only what is most immediate. It therefore follows that the biblical composers could rely upon Israelite awareness of agency scripts so as to *leave out* of the text many details or even entire stages of the agency process. In addition, the biblical narration could rely upon Israelite conventional metonymies so as to emphasize the connection between the principal and the agent.[15]

Two Overlooked Commonplaces of Narration

Let me now spell out how these commonplaces of ellipsis and of metonymy manifest and function in biblical narration when agents are sent on a mission in the human realm. An important commonplace that relies upon ellipsis can be articulated as follows: *It can be assumed that upon arrival, messengers expeditiously name their principal.* This common-place applies when the text's audience *already knows* who the sender is.[16] This common-place is supported by a presumption that the principal is surely eager for the errand to be completed (otherwise, why go to the trouble of dispatching a messenger?). It is also supported by the fact that a message cannot be considered to have been delivered until the recipient knows that it *is* a message, and also knows who *sent* the message.

Because a messenger's self-identification *as an agent* is a required part of the messaging script, it does not need be mentioned. It is present by ellipsis. This convention is amply attested in the Bible's depictions of messaging situations within the human social realm.[17]

As for *metonymy*'s role in the narration of an agency situation, an important commonplace is this: *A narrator (or speaker) may refer to an agent's action as if it were*

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[15] That is, the text's composers could rely upon its audience both to readily fill in the ellipses and to unpack the oblique references, as that audience naturally strove to interpret the narrative as depicting a meaningful chain of events.

[16] My focus here is solely on the *announce principal* stage of the message process (see Appendix 6), because it is a key to the interpretation of many passages that depict God's agents.

By focusing on the *delivery of a message*, I mean to exclude surreptitious activity, such as spying or assassination, in which the agent likewise operates remotely but hides the principal's identity. However, this commonplace applies not only to messaging but also to all errands in which agents must identify under whose authority they are acting (e.g., when the king of Gerar sends one or more agents to take Sarah into his household; Gen 20:2).

[17] See Appendix 5, s.v. commonplace #5. For other examples of ellipsis in biblical depictions of agency, see Appendix 6.

the principal's action—for example, using the principal's name to refer to the agent. Here is an example; the speaker is Jephthah, who is recounting history while in the midst of tense international negotiations:

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וַיִּשְׁלַח יִשְׂרָאֵל מַלְאָכִים אֶל־סִיחוֹן מֶלֶךְ־הָאֱמֹרִי מֶלֶךְ חֶשְׁבּוֹן

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"Then **Israel** sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon. . . "

(Judg 11:19; NJPS)

The party who had dispatched the messengers in question was actually Moses, but Jephthah refers to him as *Yisra'el*—namely, the principal whom Moses was representing as their leader.[18] Jephthah uses metonymy because for his present purposes it is the national interest that is salient, not Moses' own identity.[19]

Another version of this kind of metonymy is specific to the depiction of messaging. It can be couched as follows: *A narrator (or speaker) may call a messenger by the principal's name while the mission is underway.* Here is an example from the continuation of the verse just cited:[20]

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וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל נַעְבְּרָה־נָּא בְאַרְצְךָ עַד־מְקוֹמִי

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"**Israel** said to him, 'Allow us to cross through your country to my homeland.' . . ."

(Judg 11:19; NJPS, adapted)

Here the metonym refers to the messengers who delivered Moses' message. When Jephthah designates the chief messenger as *Yisra'el,* it underscores that as the latter spoke to the Amorite king, he was representing his principal—the nation.[21]

(Our iceberg now sums up what lies beneath the surface of our motif. . . .)

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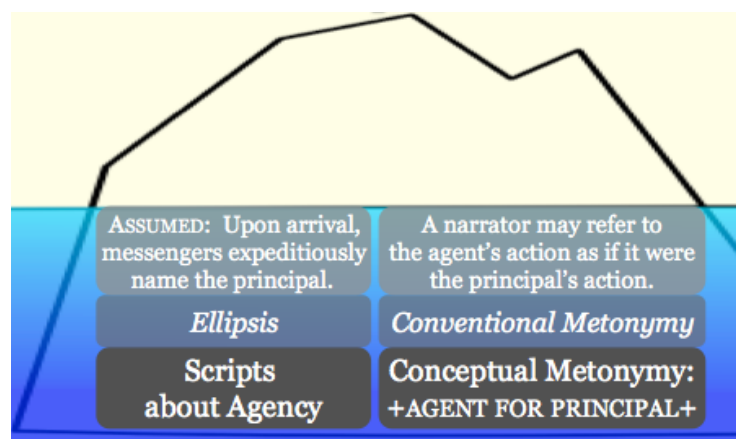
[18] See Deut 2:26; cf. Num 21:21. This distorted participant reference is recognizably a figure of speech; everyone knows that the nation as a whole cannot literally dispatch messengers.

[19] For additional biblical examples, see Appendix 7.

[20] See further Appendix 5, s.v. commonplace #6.

[21] Linguists call such usage "pragmatically motivated." See Appendix 3.

Summary of Commonplaces

I am about to demonstrate that these two commonplaces are keys to the understanding of a classic instance in which the Bible depicts God's agents. But first I must emphasize that these commonplaces were well entrenched in the minds of ancient Israelites. These ways of thinking and speaking came up multiple times every day because people were continually engaging agents to make things happen. In addition, the entire society was regularly conceptualized as a nested hierarchy of masters and servants—in other words, of principals and agents.[22] Consequently, these ways of thinking and talking would come instantly and automatically to mind in agency situations.[23]

The commonplaces just discussed are among more than fifteen relevant agency commonplaces I have compiled.[24] They are documented and discussed mainly in Appendixes 4 and 5.[25] *All* are evident somewhere in the biblical text itself, with regard to human principals who engage human agents; most of them are attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East, as well.

Demonstration (Genesis 18)

To demonstrate what kind of difference it makes to construe the biblical text in light of known commonplaces, let us look at the opening of a particularly challenging passage, the story of Abraham's visitors in Genesis 18.[26] I will now argue that when construed

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[22] See J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (2001), pp. 70–71; Paula McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (1999).

[23] A contemporary analogy is seen when you start to type something on your electronic device and its software suggests the completion of that word. Just as those suggestions are prioritized by the known frequency of use relative to what has already been typed, so too are the agency commonplaces called to mind within an agency frame.

[24] As far as I know, no such summary list has yet appeared in scholarly literature as a heuristic for biblical interpretation. A less comprehensive and less succinct synopsis appeared in my "Dictionary of Gender in the Torah," an appendix to the CJPS translation in *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2006).

[25] Most of these commonplaces follow from the nature of agency; some of them are mutually reinforcing linguistic usages, as diagrammed in Appendix 1. Others follow from the hierarchical social structure of Israelite society. On the methodological validity of applying to the divine realm these commonplaces from human-to-human communication, see Appendix 1.

[26] For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Appendix 9. For an outline of the highlights of that analysis, see the handout that is attached to this PDF file.

according to the commonplaces, Abraham recognizes all three visitors as agents of his deity, and that he does so before he gets up from being seated. (Before invoking those commonplaces, however, I must establish what the grammar is telling us, and pay some attention to semantics.)

V. 1a: וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְיָ

Given the semantics of this particular verb and the *niphʻal* stem, the process that this clause credits to the actor (designated here as *Yhwh*) is really a matter of *the recipient's apperception*. Therefore this claim by the narrator is not actualized *unless and until* Abraham experiences that recognition. The text's audience is thus prompted to expect this condition to be fulfilled at the first possible opportunity.[27]

V. 1b: וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב

The opening of this clause confirms that Abraham is the focus of attention—the starting point for whatever happens next. And the participle establishes that the main-line action *that was just mentioned*—that is, Abraham's apperception of a connection with his deity—occurred and was completed *while Abraham was still sitting*.

V. 2: שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים

This, of course, is the narrator's designation for what Abraham initially perceives—which is exactly the point of view needed to fulfill the expectation generated in verse 1a. Here I will make **four** overlapping and mutually reinforcing points:

    #1. A *literal* construal of the references made to the respective actors in verses 1 and 2 creates a discontinuity: *Yahweh* in verse 1a has been suddenly replaced by *šelošah ʼanašim* in verse 2! But as we have seen, such a discontinuity is the hallmark of metonymy. Happily, construing *Yahweh* as a metonym instantly resolves the reference problem.[28] And such a construal would have been deeply entrenched—for as we have seen, everyone in ancient Israel knew that a narrator may refer to the agents' action as if it were the principal's action. This goes without saying.

    My analysis is agnostic as to whether God's agents in this story are human or divine; for the present purposes, that issue is moot, because it does not affect *what the agency motif says about God*—which is my main interest. (That is, I see no reason to assume that God as a principal would treat differently the two types of agents as such.) The same commonplaces apply either way. See further in Appendix 9 at verse 2a.

    [27] For further analysis of this verse, see Appendix 9.

    [28] On the semantic acceptability of this reading, see Appendix 9, ad loc.

(Why would the narrator resort to such a figure of speech at the very opening of this episode? Because it obviates the need to depict a whole scene in which God had commissioned, instructed, and dispatched these agents. And at the same time, the metonymy underscores that Abraham's visitors are arriving in order to deepen God's relationship with him.)

#2. At least one other commonplace about agency supports the automatic understanding that these *'anašim* must be God's agents: *The higher a person's social rank, the more likely that his/her communications are carried out by agents.*

#3. Additional commonplaces would also be brought to bear, to drive home the conclusion that Abraham surely recognizes these agents of God *as such*. In particular, as previously mentioned *it goes without saying* that these visitors expeditiously name God as the principal whom they are representing. It goes without saying because the text's audience already knows the principal's identity—*and because everyone knows* that is how agents operate. This commonplace is buttressed by two others:

Whenever one person encounters another, they must establish their relative social rank. and *When agency is involved, what counts is the social rank of the principal—not that of the messenger.* So of course Abraham and his visitors are going to promptly confirm their respective identities and thus negotiate their relative rank. Hence by both ellipsis and metonymy, the condition set up by verse 1a has now been fulfilled— Abraham recognizes that he has been contacted by his deity!

#4. The clincher—if we really need one—is a *lexical* observation: As I explained in a paper yesterday to the Biblical Lexicography Section, cognitively speaking, *'anašim* is the Hebrew language's basic-level term for referring to a party of agents; as such, it is the *default choice for introducing agents into a narrative*.[29] For example, here is the very first instance of the word *'anašim* in the Bible:

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וַיְצַו עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים וַיְשַׁלְּחוּ אֹתוֹ . . .

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Pharaoh appointed agents (*'anašim*) to send [Abram] off . . . (Gen 12:20).

Semantically speaking, the noun *'anašim* regards its referent in terms of the existence of the relationship between that agent and the principal. Functionally speaking, it signifies the crucial distinction between an agent and an autonomous person. This meaning of *anashim* is evoked whenever the situational context indicates that its referent is

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[29] "Agency: Making Sense of Anomalous Usages of the Hebrew Noun *'iš*," to be presented to the SBL Biblical Lexicography section, Nov. 23, 2015; see also David E. S. Stein, "The Noun איש in Biblical Hebrew: A Term of Affiliation," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* Vol. 8, Art. 1 (2008). See further below, Appendix 8.

representing another party. That is precisely the situational context in Genesis 18! And given that *'anašim* is an entrenched, basic-level term, its "agency" sense would have come immediately to mind.

Taking all of this together, the ancient audience would have automatically understood that *Yhwh* is not present in this scene. This point bears restating. The persona known as *Yhwh*, having presumably dispatched these agents from somewhere else, is not directly in view. And that fact goes without saying *because everyone knows* that what agents do is to *stand in* for their principal.

But surely you are wondering: "How consistent is this reading with the rest of the story—in which the narrator explicitly states that God speaks?!" So I must at least touch upon the issue of who is actually addressing Abraham and Sarah in verse 13—the first verse in which one of their visitors is named.[30]

V. 13: וַיֹּאמֶר יְיָ אֶל־אַבְרָהָם   ***Wa-yo'mer Yhwh 'el 'abraham***

This designation as *Yhwh* creates a discontinuity in the participant references if construed literally. Again, this situation is the hallmark of a metonym. It evokes the commonplace that *a narrator (or speaker) may call a messenger by the principal's name while the mission is underway.* So the normal understanding here would be that the narrator is referring to the party who has already been speaking—namely, the chief agent—and designating him in terms of his principal, as "*Yhwh.*" Here, the metonym underscores for the audience the idea that when this messenger reiterates his prediction of a most unlikely yet fateful miracle, he is continuing to speak for his principal.[31]

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[30] To continue with analysis of the verse, see Appendix 9.

[31] A very similar linguistic usage (likewise reflecting commonplace #6) also appears later in our Genesis story, after two of those same agents have arrived in Sodom. They reveal their plans to Abraham's nephew Lot, who promptly attributes their imminent actions to their principal (19:12–14):

> Then the *'anašim* (agents) said to Lot, ". . . **We** are about to destroy this place. . . .
> The Lᴏʀᴅ has sent **us** to destroy it." So Lot went out . . . and said, ". . . **the Lᴏʀᴅ**
> is about to destroy the city." (NJPS, excerpted and adapted)

Lot's metonym conveys that his visitors *are acting upon God's express wishes*. It adds emotional punch as he tries to persuade his sons-in-law to evacuate. The situation's seriousness prompts him to underscore the supreme authority behind the agents' announced intentions.

Given that Lot is a character within the story, his linguistic usage confirms that the composer(s) of this story were aware of the narrative convention that he expresses—and that they expected the text's audience to find it conventional, as well.

(The remaining instances of the name *Yhwh* in Genesis 18 can be construed in the same manner—as metonymies.)[32]

Discussion of the Implications

As we have seen, the very nature of agency allows for distinctive narrative conventions—such as ellipsis and metonymy—that are readily put to use.[33] Genesis 18 shows us the *highly compact quality* of narrative expression when an agency relationship is involved—and when its commonplaces are taken into account by the text's audience.

But as you know, most other scholars read this passage rather differently! They take all of the participant references literally.[34] And they claim that the typical recipient of God's message does *not* initially recognize the principal's identity unless the narrator tells us so. Hence most modern interpreters conclude that the Bible repeatedly "confuses" or "blurs" or "conflates" Israel's God with the agents whom this deity dispatches.[35] However, in light of what I have presented, ironically it is not the biblical composers but rather those scholars who seem to have confused God with God's agents.

Appendix 10 discusses fourteen more passages that depict God's operation via agents, using the "iceberg" approach outlined here.[36] Methodologically speaking, the "iceberg effect" should take priority in our interpretations of such passages, because of its

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[32] See Appendix 9.

[33] The Bible uses ellipsis also with God's human messengers. Consider the prophet Jonah's brief pronouncement in Nineveh ("Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"; Jon 3:4, NJPS). Its residents (v. 5) and king (vv. 8–9) instantly understand that the source of this warning is God (*'elohim*, with verbs inflected in the singular). But how could they have known the identity of Jonah's principal—or that he was indeed representing anyone but himself? Clearly it went without saying that Jonah announced his principal while he was delivering the message.

[34] Literal construal of a figure of speech yields something other than its plain sense. This is not to say that interpretations based on a literal reading are uninteresting or invalid, but rather that they are midrashic. See Appendix 14.

[35] To then make sense of the ostensible conflation, scholars generally draw theological conclusions—such as that God has appeared to Abraham in human form. (However, they have not provided a convincing warrant for imagining that the ancient audience would have thought in such terms.) Some scholars posit ancient theologically motivated textual emendations. A few scholars instead proffer nontheological solutions, such as by attributing the anomalies to laconic literary style or textual corruption. For a chronological synopsis of selected scholars' views on the subject, see Appendix 11.

[36] Most other cases that likewise involve God's agents are much simpler than Genesis 18.

cognitive priority for the ancient audience. We have warrant to reach for other explanations only *after* this approach seems insufficient to account for the text's wording.[37]

Translation into English

Finally, let us take a look at how the foregoing considerations challenge those who attempt to render our motif of interest *for a freestanding idiomatic English translation* (as exemplified by NJPS—the translation with which I am most familiar).[38] The main challenge to translation is that many of the commonplaces of agency that existed in ancient Israel are not shared by contemporary American culture.[39] Precisely because commonplaces usually go without saying, the differing expectations pose a problem for

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[37] In his examination of biblical poetry, Kevin Chau likewise concludes that "accounting for metonymy can solve many of the interpretive problems with which scholars struggle" (p. 650).

Why was the agency motif used (occasionally) to depict God's interaction with humankind? Why does the text bother to depict messaging rather than a straightforward theophany? Within the larger metaphor of personification, the motif of agency offers a more realistic depiction of actual experience: The biblical accounts of visits from God's agents exemplify how religiously oriented human beings nearly always experience God's caring and commitment: via third parties whom we construe as agents of the divine—much like seeing divinity only out of the corner of our eye—and sometimes only in retrospect. (Sometimes, of course, those "third parties" are other species or inanimate things.) We tend to receive messages, rather than glimpsing God directly.

[38] Of course, the translation challenges depend somewhat upon the translator's goals. For the sake of illustration, I assume that we wish to render such passages for a general American audience, and for use in settings that call for the audience's quick apprehension of the text's plain sense. These goals warrant an idiomatic English rendering without extensive notes, as exemplified by the New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS) translation. A more literal translation approach would have even greater difficulty than I proceed to describe.

[39] In contemporary America, we of course take our own agency commonplaces for granted. So consider that an outsider might find the following conventions oddly inconsistent:

• If we telephone someone but don't reach them and instead leave a message with a third party who has answered the phone, we usually refer to the message's recipient in the third person: "Please ask Carole to call me." But if we reach voice mail (or an answering machine) instead and leave that same message, we will address the recipient in the second person—as if we were speaking directly to them: "Carole, give me a call!"

• If we get into a taxicab and sit down, we have implicitly commissioned the driver to serve as our transportation agent (and meanwhile, a body of law and regulations have spelled out our commitments to each other). Yet when we sit down in the office of a real estate agent, or an attorney, or a literary agent, no agency relationship is created; before any of the latter will represent us, we need to sign a contract.

translators.[40] Biblical characters who behave normally in Hebrew suddenly seem to exhibit bizarre behavior in English!

Let us recall the translator's basic goal as classically framed by translation consultant Katharine Barnwell—namely, ensuring that "the receivers of the translated message can receive the same message that the hearers of the original message received."[41] And Barnwell has long taught that "under certain specific circumstances it may be necessary to make some information explicit in the translation, even though it was not explicit in the original message."[42]

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[40] For the purposes of this paper, the ancient translations (Septuagint, Targums, Peshitta, Vulgate) have seemed unreliable as a guide to their source text (*Vorlage*)*,* because the matter is confounded not only by the interpretations of the translators—who were not necessarily striving to reproduce the plain sense—but also by whether the *agency-related commonplaces* in their time and place (including linguistic conventions of the target language) match those that underlie biblical Hebrew. For example, the Targums are known for their practice of mentioning angels in passages where the Masoretic Text mentions only *Yhwh*. This is usually construed as a matter of ideology (i.e., an insertion to avoid anthropomorphizing the deity). Alternatively, it may reflect the translators' attempt to reckon with the fact that the commonplaces of their day did not license conventional metonymies in Aramaic like those encountered in the Hebrew text (according to my reading), and that consequently they needed to supply insertions—much like the bracketed interpolations that I have suggested here for English.

[41] Katharine Barnwell, *Bible Translation: An Introductory Course in Translation Principles*, 3rd edn. (Horsleys Green, England: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1986), p. 125. She is addressing translators who produce idiomatic (thought-for-thought) rather than literal (word-for-word) renderings.

Barnwell's challenge to translators to convey "the same message" points to another aspect of the problem: languages have their own customary ways of identifying and tracking the characters in a narrative. As Lénart de Regt has observed, "Bible translations illustrate that the systems of participant reference in the source texts are not the same as those in receptor languages" (*Participants in Old Testament Texts and the Translator*, p. 96; see below, Appendix 11). He shows how this fact necessitates a certain amount of adaptation by translators. However, he urges that "where possible, unusual patterns of referring to participants should be rendered by patterns of the receptor language which correspond in function, if not in form: they should give the same rhetorical information and communicate the intentions of the composer" (p. 97). Although de Regt did not consider metonyms among the "reference devices" that he studied, his counsel surely applies to them as well.

[42] Ibid. The circumstances that she names include instances where the text mentions an "unknown custom," and where the translation would otherwise give a "wrong or obscure" meaning (pp. 129, 131).

Surely we are dealing here with such cases—where translators would be justified in making implicit cultural information explicit. One approach to accomplish that is *interpolation*. In Gen 18:1, this might suggest (with boldface to indicate the changes relative to NJPS):

> The LORD **became apparent** to him **[via His agents]**. . . .

That interpolation would convey that Abraham's visitors are acting upon God's express wishes.[43] Unfortunately, however, such interpolations lack the dramatic impact of the source language's metonymy.[44]

A more idiomatic approach would seek out English word choices whose collocation implies that the act in question was actually carried out by an agent. This approach preserves the compactness of metonyms. This is the approach that I implicitly made recourse to earlier, and I think it works pretty well in this instance:

> The LORD **contacted** him by the terebinths of Mamre**:** he was sitting at
> the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot**;** **l**ooking up, he saw three
> **agents** standing near him. . . .

The options get more awkward when you come to verse 13. The problem is that *in the middle of narrated dialogue*, English idiom does not allow for a sudden metonymy in reference to one of the speakers. I (at least) cannot think of a verb that would *imply* that the following birth annunciation was actually *spoken by the chief agent*. Consequently, a combination of *both* careful verb choice *and* interpolation seems necessary.

These examples illustrate (among other things) that not all English predicates lend themselves to a metonymic construal of their subjects. This has a lot to do with the

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[43] In effect, the interpolation approach recasts the Hebrew metonym as an ellipsis of the messaging process.

[44] Furthermore, an interpolation approach would probably *not* be well received if deployed in the long exchange between Abraham and God's agent in 18:22–33, where the agent is designated three times by the name *Yhwh*. Translators who rendered as "[the agent of] the LORD" would likely be accused by academics of bowdlerizing the text to avoid anthropomorphizing God; and liberal Jewish readers who have long taken pride that in this passage Abraham "argues with God" would probably take umbrage at the "insinuation" that their ancestor contended "merely" with an angel.

(The 2006 CJPS translation, for which I served as revising translator, rendered *'anašim* as "[divine] envoys." That was before I understood *'anašim* to be a basic-level term corresponding most closely to "agents." The latter rendering is not always suitable as a matter of English idiom, but in this context it seems fitting.)

manner by which the designated action is carried out. And English verbs encode that manner of action with varying levels of specificity.

Appendix 12 discusses these translation issues in more detail.[45]

Conclusions

The motif that "God operates via agents" has been widely characterized by scholars as displaying anomalies in narrative continuity and the tracking of participants. However, I contend that most of those anomalies are best construed as commonplace expressions that were part of everyday thinking about agency. Such usages are predicted by linguistic theory. They are also well known from parallel biblical situations in the human domain. In that light, the ostensible "co-occurrence of two speakers with one message" turns out to be only one speaker: an agent who conveys the divine message.

The explanation offered here has not only great explanatory power but also broad implications for exegesis of the Bible's depictions of God and of God's agents. It is consistent with the way that the human mind works, and with normal Hebrew grammar, syntax, lexicon, and with cultural commonplaces as attested in the Bible itself and in the ancient Near East. By default, this approach invalidates the prevailing literal readings, which thus founder like a ship that has ventured too close to an iceberg.
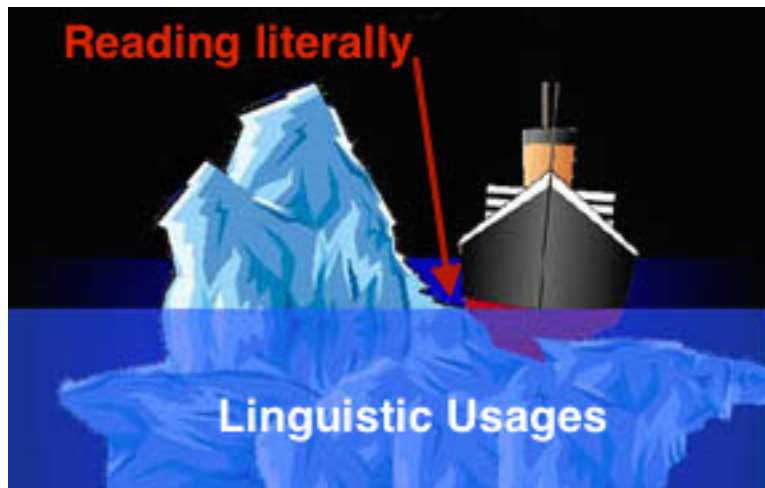
Finally, with regard to preparing an idiomatic translation, such a translation alone—without notes or commentary—can convey the Bible's depictions of agency with mixed success, due to the figures of speech involved. Yet despite the translation chal-

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[45] On lexical translation challenges, see Appendix 13.

lenges—or really because of them—the good news for biblical scholars is: a vital role remains for us, as explicators of the text. At least, provided that we scholars pay attention to the ancient commonplaces!   [END]

Table of Appendixes

Appendix 1: Methodological Validity

Ironically, the Bible initially pays far more attention to *God's* agents than to the agents of its *human* characters. We encounter God acting as a principal before we see humans doing so. Similarly, even though in the Bible most instances of the term *mal'ak* ("messenger") refer to agents of human beings, its first thirteen appearances refer to agents of God. And in its very first instance (Gen 2:23), the term *'iš* (in an agency context: "representative participant; agent"; see Appendix 8) arguably designates the primordial human being as an agent of God (after his having been created to fulfill a mission, 2:15), prior to its use to refer to an agent of a human being (4:1, as Eve names her *'iš*, "successor"; she is thus the first person to appoint an agent—although Abel does not outlive her and therefore his agency does not become operational). However, literary sequence should not be confused with cognitive sequence. Surely the audience's *existing cultural knowledge* of human-to-human agency practices was invoked to interpret all of the Bible's descriptions of God's agents.

Given that both standard scripts and standard linguistic expressions were well known in the human realm, and given that both arose from the same cognitive conception, we have every reason to expect that *a whole cohesive complex* of associated commonplaces was being marshaled whenever our agency motif was invoked. For instance, various distinct conventional manners of speech are all related at a deeper level:
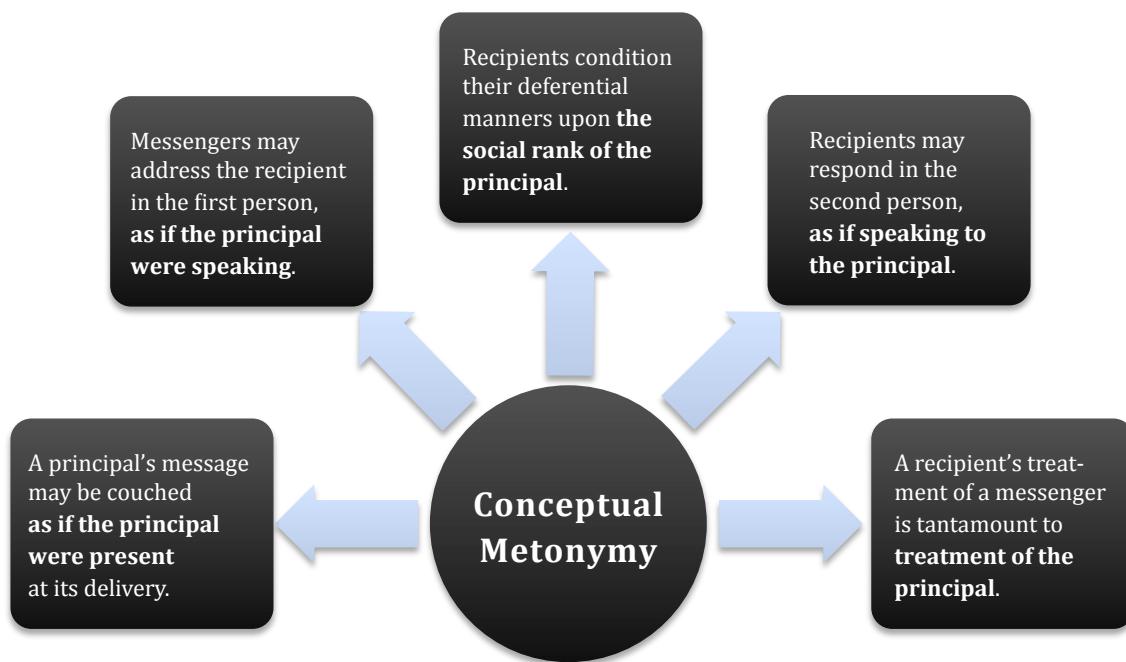
My broader consideration of how agency is treated in the Bible finds consistency. This means that it is methodologically valid to apply the conceptual category of "messenger" to all characters who function in that capacity, regardless of the Hebrew term used to designate them.

Regarding the identification and analysis of conceptual metonyms, Zacharias Kotzé has cautioned that they are not obvious—and therefore subject to misapprehension. He observes: "Determining the linguistic vehicle is the necessary, and relatively unproblematic, first step in the analysis of conceptual . . . metonymy. Identifying the image, however, often proves to be more strenuous." He adds: "Since cultural understanding underlies the use of [conceptual metonymy], it is important to substantiate the image that is anticipated by the use of a certain vehicle" (Zacharias Kotzé, "A Cognitive Linguistic Methodology for the Study of Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible," *JNSL* 31/1 [2005]: 107–17; here 110). In this paper, I have carefully researched the ancient human-agency commonplaces, in order to understand the "image" that results from their presumably having been applied to depictions of God.

How many of the commonplaces from human-to-human agency were expected to apply to spiritual experience, as characterized by "God"? A few commonplaces were obviously inconsistent with the basic characteristics of deities. Samuel A. Meier observes that across the ancient Near East, "some features of human messenger activity are not duplicated in the divine realm." These features derive logically from the presumption that deities are immortal and can travel freely: "The provision of escorts for human messengers was a common courtesy, if not a necessity, for safe or trouble-free communication. Passports and the circumvention of bureaucratic hurdles were persistent features of human communication. Provision for lodging and meals along an extended route was a necessity. None of these aspects of human communication reappears in depictions of divine messenger activity" ("Angel I," *DDD*, pp. 46–47). Consequently, I have not considered commonplaces that relate to the particular aspects that Meier has noted.

(These few distinctions between the presumed behavior of messengers in the divine realm versus in the human realm do not seem to justify treating the two types of messengers as qualitatively different. That is, there is little warrant for viewing the noun *mal'akh* as having distinct lexical senses depending upon which of those two realms is in view.)

In drawing up my list of agency commonplaces, I did not rely solely on biblical evidence. One of my touchstones was the scholarship on the role of messengers in the

ancient Near East. This addresses the potential objection that the social world of the Bible might not reflect the historical world of ancient Israel—and therefore not be a reliable guide to the "reading" conventions of the text's audience.

It turns out that commonplaces that are evident from the biblical descriptions of interactions among its *human* characters are remarkably consistent with extrabiblical evidence such as the Mari archives, correspondence from Ugarit, the El Amarna Letters, Hebrew ostraca, and the Elephantine papyri—all of which deal with agency relationships. Indeed, the commonplaces that are evident in the Bible match the standard practices across the ancient Near East over roughly two millennia. As John Greene concluded, "the understanding of what a messenger was, and how messengers functioned in the ancient Near East was exactly the same as that mirrored in the historical narrative material of the Hebrew Scriptures" (p. 134; see below for ref.). In addition to being consistent, the commonplaces were well known. Again, as John Greene concluded: "Messengers were ubiquitous throughout this area [the ancient Near East]; they were an integral part of its warp and woof. They were there in all aspects of its social, political and religious life. They were there in all types of literature" (p. 40). Furthermore, research found that the conventions for intrahuman agency transactions are consistent with the usages in mythological texts in Egypt, Ugarit, and Mesopotamia. Meier writes that messenger deities "all behave in a fashion similar to their human counterparts who function as messengers on earth for all humans, from royalty to commoners" ("Angel of Yahweh," *DDD*, p. 53). All of these findings confirm that the commonplaces that I have listed could readily go without saying in the biblical text, even with regard to God's agents.

See J. M. Munn-Rankin, "Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.," *Iraq* 18 (1956): 68–110; Alan D. Crown, "Tidings and Instructions: How News Travelled in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XVII/3 (1974): 244–71; Samuel A. Meier, *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*. Harvard Semitic Monographs 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); John T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East*. Brown Judaic Studies 169 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Edgar W. Conrad, "Messengers in Isaiah and the Twelve: Implications for Reading Prophetic Books," *JSOT* 91 (2000): 83–97; Abraham Malamat, "The King's Table and Provisioning of Messengers: The Recent Old Babylonian Texts from Tuttul and the Bible," *IEJ* 53 (2003): 172–77.

To illustrate the extent to which an ancient Near Eastern agent was understood to stand for the principal, consider this statement from the victory prism of King Sennacherib of Assyria, regarding King Hezekiah of Judah (cf. 2 Kgs 18:13–16): "In

order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave, he sent his personal messenger" (as quoted in Greene, p. 14). That is, the messenger literally groveled at the emperor's feet (or perhaps, given the possibility of metonymy, of the feet of the emperor's agent!) on behalf of his principal.

Even in the human realm, the Bible's commonplaces for agency have struck some previous scholars as odd; they then explained those oddities anthropologically, as evidence of a "primitive" mind. In the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), J. W. Rogerson notes that "twenty years ago there was broad agreement in OT study [that] the intellectual life of the ancient Israelites was thought in many ways to resemble that of 'primitives': [hence] the personality of one person could merge into that of another so that, for example, a messenger was simply an extension of the personality of whoever had given him the message" ("Anthropology and the OT"). In a separate entry ("Corporate Personality"), Rogerson cites Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God* (1961; reprinted by Wipf and Stock, 2006), as holding this view.

My identification of ellipsis and metonymy in biblical depictions of God's recourse to agents might be suspect as an artifact of special pleading about Hebrew, were it not for the fact that those linguistic usages can be identified in English, as well. My approach thus meets the methodological criteria that Samuel Meier poses in response to Cynthia L. Miller's 1996 monograph *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis* (reviewed in *JQR*, LXXXIX/1–2 [July–October, 1998]: 230–35). Regarding Miller's assertion regarding the ancient Hebrew writer's tendencies, Meier wisely remarks: "Are there other languages that do this? Does Hebrew itself reinforce this . . . elsewhere in the language? A linguistic analysis undergirded with such comparative data is essential" (p. 230).

In her critique of certain scholars' approaches, Amelia Devin Freedman (pp. 69–70) has raised methodological questions that arguably apply here as well: Is it valid for me to equate the biblical world with the ancient Near Eastern world, with regard to their commonplaces and in particular their linguistic conventions? That is, do my reconstructed presuppositions of a textually bound implied audience really match those of the historically original real audience? What if I have incorrectly identified the implied reader, as a result of the incomplete—and possibly nonrepresentative—nature of the extant evidence? And what if the text's composer(s) were wrong about the real readers' familiarity with the associated commonplaces?

This last concern is actually irrelevant, for it amounts to supposing that the original real audience (itself a construct) misconstrued the text's plain sense. My focus is on what the text's composer(s) could *reliably assume* that their audience would presuppose, and not on how that historical audience actually construed the text (which was a function of emotional state, possible lack of sleep, inability to hear the speaker clearly, and many other factors). The remaining issues I address at salient points in my argument. See further "Construing Authorial Intent" in [my preface to *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation*](#) (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), pp. xii–xiii.

Appendix 2: The Agency Motif as a Metaphor

• Initially, I used the term "metaphor" on the grounds that this motif takes the conventional *human* practice of agency and applies it to the *divine* domain. But I have since learned that many biblical scholars maintain that the ancients intended all of their "deity-talk" *literally* rather than metaphorically. By "literally" I mean that the language is construed as nonfigurative—what George Lakoff has called "directly meaningful," as opposed to being understood in terms of something else. For example, consider the story of Sarai's pregnant runaway slave Hagar, who encounters a *mal'ak Yhwh* while taking refuge at a well (Gen 16:7–14). Many scholars tend to read this passage as if the Bible's composers meant to say that Hagar really saw some kind of physical figure that actually carried on a conversation with her, and whom the narrator later claimed to be God. Contrast this reading with the view of R. Moses Maimonides: "Every mention of seeing, when referring to God, . . . refers to intellectual apprehension" (*Guide of the Perplexed* 1:4); and the comment by R. Obadiah Sforno (ca. 1475–1550) at Gen 16:7, glossing *we-yimṣa'ah* ("he found her") with ". . . in a state of readiness for perceiving the divine." On the many senses of the word "literal," see Gary Alan Long, "Dead or Alive? Literality and God-Metaphors in the Hebrew Bible," *JAAR* 62/2 (Summer 1994), pp. 509–37.

• By "metaphor" I mean that our motif of interest describes the target domain of *spiritual experience* in terms of the source domain of *mundane experience*. Like dreams, descriptions of spiritual experience are always "as if"—they are not literally true in the same way that a depiction of mundane experience can be considered true.

• "Spiritual experience" and "mundane experience" may also be characterized by the states of consciousness that they reflect: spiritual consciousness and mundane consciousness, respectively. A cognitive mapping operation is necessary because within spiritual consciousness, reality is seen to *operate by different rules* than the reality perceived within mundane consciousness. So if by "metaphor" we mean "describing something in terms of something else," then the biblical depictions of God—and in particular its anthropomorphisms—could only have been metaphorical. (On the distinct rules for spiritual consciousness, see, e.g., Lawrence LeShan, *Alternate Realities: The Search for the Full Human Being* [New York: M. Evans and Co., 1976]; Arthur Green, *See My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Jewish Theology* [Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992]; and James Kugel, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* [New York: Free Press, 2003].)

- A precise formulation of our metaphor of interest would be: +GOD IS A PRINCIPAL WHO OPERATES VIA AGENTS+, in which "principal" in the source domain (sometimes called the "vehicle") is mapped to "God" in the target domain. That is, the metaphor invites the audience to draw a correspondence between what they know about humans' use of agents and to what the text is saying about how God works in the world. God is depicted in human terms—while denying that God is human. (On the application of the concept of mapping to cognition, see the now-classic account in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; afterword 2003].)

- This metaphor overlaps with some other prominent conceptual metaphors applied to God, such as +GOD IS KING+, because personages with high social status function best by delegating tasks to their subordinates. Indeed, the very first human being in the Bible who is said to operate via agents is the ruler of Egypt (Gen 12:20).

- Likewise, the agency metaphor is consistent with the +GOD IS A HUSBAND+ and +GOD IS A HOUSEHOLDER+ metaphors, for the members of an Israelite corporate household were (under certain circumstances) viewed as the agents of the paterfamilias.

- At the same time, +GOD OPERATES VIA AGENTS+ (my shorthand formulation of the metaphor) is incompatible with certain other personification metaphors, such as +GOD IS OUR SHEPHERD+, which involves "personal" involvement with the flock.

- Where it is applicable, +GOD OPERATES VIA AGENTS+ enriches the relatively lean metaphor of divine personification. Relative to +GOD IS A PERSON+, these metaphors increase the number of correspondences in the conceptual mapping from the source domain to the target domain. By adding concreteness to the imagery, they supply a more tangible conceptual structure for comprehending God's impact on the world. On enriched metaphors, see the handy summary in Friedrich Ungerer and Hans-Jörg Schmid, *An Introduction to Cognitive Linguistics*, 2nd edn. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Ltd., 2006), pp. 126–27.

- By the late Bronze Age (when the people Israel arose), the depiction of deities as operating via agents had long been institutionalized in ancient Near Eastern cultural discourse, converting what had once been a "metaphor" (in the sense of a creative expression) into an "idiom." (On this terminological distinction, see Menachem Dagut, *Hebrew-English Translation: A Linguistic Analysis of Some Semantic Problems* [Haifa: University of Haifa, 1978], p. 98. At the same time, +GOD OPERATES VIA AGENTS+ was a "generic metaphor" in the sense of a mapping from one conceptual domain to another; see below, n. 10. As Samuel Meier notes, "the gods of the ancient Near East,

like humans, communicated with each other over great distances by means of messengers" ("Angel I," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* [hereinafter: *DDD*], 2nd edn. [Leiden: Brill, 1998], p. 46). At the same time, "messenger deities function primarily as links between gods and not between gods and humans; when a major god wishes to communicate with a human, he or she can be expected to make a personal appearance" (ibid., "Angel of Yahweh," p. 53).

• The metaphor +GOD OPERATES VIA AGENTS+ is not in itself a *gendered* metaphor, for both in the biblical world and in the ancient Near East, women as well as men engage agents and serve as agents. Biblical women who engage agents include: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Pharaoh's daughter, Tamar (Judah's daughter-in-law), Deborah, Delilah, Jezebel, Naomi, and Esther. Women who serve as agents include: Hagar, Bilhah, Zilpah, Moses' sister, Moses' mother, and Ruth.

• David H. Aaron, in his *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Boston: Brill, 2001), argues cogently that within the ancient worldview, it went without saying that *iconic* imagery of deities was not "literal" (that is, not expressive of ontological identity). Similarly, I have argued that in the Bible—as in the ancient world generally—it went without saying that *literary* imagery about God was not literal; and further, that this convention did not need to be stated because such ascriptive idioms were so thoroughly a part of the culture. See my article "On Beyond Gender: Representation of God in the Torah and in Three Recent Renditions into English," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 15 (Spring 2008): 108–37; Andrea Weiss, *Figurative Language in Biblical Prose Narrative: Metaphor in the Book of Samuel* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). On the cline that spans literal and figurative language, see chapter 14 in Vyvyan Evans, *How Words Mean: Lexical Concepts, Cognitive Models, and Meaning Construction* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Appendix 3: Linguistic Views of Metonymy

Theoretical Aspects

As a conceptual metonymy, +AGENT FOR PRINCIPAL+ is a culturally imposed cognitive model of how "representation" works. It is partonomic—that is, based on a relationship of contiguity: "principal" and "agent" are related yet distinct entities.[46] Cognitive linguists state that metonymy represents a mental connecting force that is "inherent in the basic structure of human language and in the basic structure of the mind" (Nerlich and Clarke, p. 268).

Linguistic metonymy is all about making a reference to something efficiently and compellingly. The expressed term and its implication together resonate in the audience's mind so as to produce additional meaning. Beatrice Warren explains the phenomenon as a kind of triangulation: "the explicit modifier (source) and the implicit head (target) together pick out the intended referent. Kettle in *the kettle is boiling* does not refer simply to water but to the water in the kettle."[47]

That a narrator employs a metonym at a particular juncture is no coincidence; rather, it is what linguists call "pragmatically motivated." As some cognitive linguists have noted, "metonymy is a pragmatic strategy used by speakers to convey to hearers *something new* about something already well known" (Nerlich and Clarke, p. 252; emphasis added). Furthermore, metonymy "steals meaning from related concepts [and thereby] *strengthens* given conceptual structures" (ibid., p. 253; emphasis added). If so, then what is "strengthened" when an agent is designated by the principal's name? The significance of the agency relationship itself.

Consider also how E. J. Revell's study *The Designation of the Individual: Expressive Usage in Biblical Hebrew* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996) made sense of variations in participant reference: "Where a nominal designation composed of a single

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[46] On metonymy from a cognitive perspective, see the handy summary in chapter 3 of Ungerer and Schmid. See also the introductions for biblical scholars by Kevin Chau, "Metaphor's Forgotten Brother: A Survey of Metonymy in Biblical Hebrew Poetry," *Journal for Semitics* 23/2i [2014]: 633–52; and by Travis Bott, "Praise and Metonymy in the Psalms," in *Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, edited by William P. Brown (NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[47] Beatrice Warren, "Producing and Interpreting Metaphor and Metonymy: An Alternative Account of the Interpretation of Metonymy and Metaphor" (plenary paper), Linguistic Association of Canada and the United States, July 27, 2000, Houston; as quoted in Nerlich and Clarke, p. 268.

term is used, the choice between the available terms allows the narrator to present the character in the role best suited to his purpose" (p. 45). That is, part of what gives a designation meaning is the fact that a choice of possible designations is involved. As Revell notes, meaning can be conveyed "by contrast, by [one word's] use where another word is to be expected" (p. 101). Although Revell does not consider conventional metonymy per se, his approach points to the significance of the narrator's (or speaker's) sudden recourse to a metonym, such as by designating the agent by the principal's name in the middle of an exchange: it marks that particular statement by the messenger as being *more central to the concerns of the principal*.

Real-World Examples from the English-Language Press

Here are two typical news items that employ agency metonyms. The first one begins with such a metonym.

> **The White House** announced today that an Iranian woman will take over their floral operations. Hedieh "Roshan" Ghaffarian's first duty will be next week's state dinner with China. . . . First lady **Michelle Obama** announced the appointment Thursday. . . .

This story leads with a figure of speech: "the White House" is a metonym equivalent to +PRINCIPAL FOR AGENT+; as we learn only later, it designates Michelle Obama, who as First Lady occupies the traditional role of White House hostess. (At the same time, "the White House" is also a +BUILDING FOR INSTITUTION+ metonym; it stands for the Executive Office of the President of the United States.) Opening with such a metonym underscores that Ms. Obama was speaking on behalf of the institution that she is representing.[48]

The second example employs an agency metonym later in the piece. It is adapted from a newspaper sports article about a professional baseball team with the awkwardly long but fortuitously topical name of The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim:[49]

> **Angels manager Mike Scioscia** pulled starting pitcher Andrew Heaney after six
> scoreless innings. . . . **The Angels** are closely monitoring Heaney's workload.

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[48] Emily Hull, "White House Names New Head Florist," *Washington D.C. Sun Times* 09/17/15; http://goo.gl/D5xEqW

[49] Source: Mike DiGiovanna, "Angels Don't Get Stuck in Regrets," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 2015, p. D5. In order to find a contemporary example of metonymy, I opened a random day's sports section and picked the first article that seemed to mention a principal–agent relationship. The metonymic usage of interest is so common that I could find such an example with ease.

Here the role of *principal* is played by the team (a corporation); and the role of *agent*, by the team's manager (an employee). The pitcher is new to the major league and thus relatively untested. Now, who in actuality is "closely monitoring" this pitcher? Surely it is the same manager who was previously mentioned! Yet the writer now refers to him via a +PRINCIPAL FOR AGENT+ metonym: "The Angels."

Why did the sportswriter switch in mid-discourse to such an oblique reference? Well, normally, a baseball team's starting pitcher is played *as much as possible*. But *this* starting pitcher is being treated with relative caution—contrary to expectation. Hence the metonymic designation for Scioscia helpfully underscores that in this regard, the manager is indeed acting on behalf of his principal.

Cognitive Entrenchment: Agency Metonyms Were Common, Everyday Usages

Kevin Chau explains that although conventional usages of metonymy are figures of speech, they are "automatically understood and pedestrian idioms. A person hearing or reading these expressions does not have to stop and think what the metonymy denotes" (p. 636). Chau notes that conventional metonymy is used in part because it is "semantically compact" (pp. 641–42).

Beatrice Warren, "Aspects of Referential Metonymy," in Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden (eds.), *Metonymy in Language and Thought* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), p. 123, states insightfully that referential metonymy works only when "there is some connection between the mentioned referent (the trigger) and the implied referent (the target) deemed so well known that in the context in question the former will automatically suggest the latter." That condition is surely met by the principal–agent relationship.

See also Geoffrey Nunberg, "The Pragmatics of Deferred Interpretation," *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 344–64. Nunberg situates metonymy within the broader linguistic category of *deferred interpretation* (or *deference*); he defines the latter as "the phenomenon whereby expressions can be used to refer to something that isn't explicitly included in the conventional denotation of that expression" (p. 344). Such usage is licensed most by the linguistic mechanism of *meaning transfer*. Nunberg notes that "meaning transfer is possible when there is a salient correspondence between the properties of one thing and the properties of another, in which case the name of the first property can be used to refer to the second" (p. 347). In order for an alternation to communicate successfully, that "salient correspondence" must be both *straightforward* and *noteworthy*. Those criteria apply to the biblical agency metonyms: The

correspondence is indeed straightforward, in that from the point of view of the narrator and all participants in the messaging process, agents acquire their most usefully distinctive properties as a result of their relationship to their principal. It is also noteworthy, that is, it is useful for identifying the agent for the matter under discussion.

Nunberg further points out that when an alternation (in our case, a metonym) is so common as to be considered conventional, there are arguments for treating it as a semantic process, even though its application is pragmatically motivated. In the biblical world with its hierarchical social structure, we should therefore consider whether in certain contexts, the very name of (or epithet for) a personage who is among the elite (e.g., a monarch) includes the meaning "and his/her agents." The reach of such personages is understood to extend far beyond their own persons per se. If so, then arguably one sense of the name *Yhwh* and of the epithet *'elohim* includes God's agents. For example, to say "Is anything too wondrous for the LORD?" (Gen 18:14, NJPS) may mean ". . . for the LORD *and His agents*." In short, when agency is taken into consideration, a name's referent may not be as unique as we normally assume. However, pursuing that argument is beyond the scope of this paper.

Appendix 4: Table of Biblical Commonplaces for Messengers, in the Human Domain

Regarding Agents in General

1	A narrator (or speaker) may refer to an agent's action as if it were the principal's action (e.g., using the principal's name to refer to the agent).	Gen 21:30; Num 15:36; 21:21; 32:2; Jud 11:17, 19; 16:19; 1 Sam 26:11–12
2	Principals can delegate an errand by stating the desired outcome, thus authorizing the agent to improvise and negotiate as needed.	Gen 24:4; 30:3–4; Jos 2:1; 9:11; 1 Sam 16:17; 2 Kgs 9:1–2; 18:17–35; Est 4:5
3 †	Agents are typically identified by others in terms of their principal, and they typically self-identify in that way.	Gen 24:34; 1 Sam 25:40; Num 22:9–10; Josh 9:8–11
4	A narrator may designate agents specifically via a noun of agency plus a genitive that names their principal.	Num 22:18; Jud 11:13; 1 Sam 19:20; 25:12, 42; 2 Sam 21:17; 1 Kgs 20:9

Regarding Messengers in Particular

<u>5</u> †	When the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it can be assumed (i.e., normally goes without saying) that upon arrival, messengers expeditiously name their principal.	Gen 32:18; 37:32; Num 21:21–22; 22:7; Josh 2:3; Jud 11:12; 1 Sam 19:14; 25:5
6 †	A narrator (or speaker) may call a messenger by the principal's name (or epithet) while the mission is underway.	Gen 50:16–17 (pronoun); Num 20:19; Josh 9:7; Jud 11:19; 2 Sam 5:1
7 *	A principal's message may be couched as if the principal were present at its delivery.	2 Kgs 18:31 (cf. v. 17)
8 *	Messengers may address the message's recipient as if the principal were speaking.	Gen 44:10 (cf. v. 17); Josh 2:14b, 18a; Jud 11:19; 1 Sam 16:19; 2 Sam. 12:27
9	Recipients who do not know the messenger would be prudent to verify credentials.	Josh 9:7–8; Neh 2:7, 9
10 *	Recipients condition their deferential manners (gestures and speech) upon the social rank of the principal—not that of the messenger.	1 Sam 25:41
11 *	Recipients may respond to a message by addressing the messenger as a stand-in for the principal.	Gen 44:9; Jud 11:13; 1 Sam 25:41; 2 Sam 3:13; 1 Kgs 20:4; 2 Kgs 3:7
12 †	A recipient's treatment of a messenger is tantamount to treatment of the principal, in terms of showing respect or disrespect.	Gen 24:30–31; 2 Sam 10:1–6

Regarding Everyone in Society

13	The higher a person's social rank, the more likely that his/her actions (and communications) are carried out by agents.	2 Sam 11:1; 15:15; 21:17; 2 Kgs 18:18
14 †	Whenever one person encounters another, they must establish their relative social rank. The social inferior must then display deference, via gestures and manner of speaking.	Gen 24:64–65; 1 Sam 26:14; Lam 4:8, 16; 5:12; Job 19:15–16
15 †	Whenever there is a group, there is a hierarchy. Only one person is in charge. By default, that person represents the group to third parties.	Exod 4:16; 7:1; 2 Kgs 18

Bold numeral = This commonplace is based upon the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency.
<u>Underlined</u> numeral = This commonplace is based upon ellipsis, a figure of speech that relies upon the messaging script.

Gray = Supports a default understanding of Gen 18:2 to the effect that Abraham's visitors must be God's agents and that Abraham recognizes them as such.

* Not a commonplace in contemporary American culture.
† Partial overlap with a commonplace in contemporary American culture.

Appendix 5: Commentary on the Commonplaces Listed in Appendix 4

#1 A narrator or speaker may refer to an agent's action as if it were the principal's action (e.g., using the principal's name to refer to the agent).

• This linguistic usage follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency. (This usage is a more general version of #6, which is specific to messengers who are in the process of delivering a message.)

• While still fugitives, David and Abishai visit King Saul's camp late one night. David directs his associate to "take" the sleeping king's spear and water jar (1 Sam 26:11). It goes without saying that Abishai follows his superior's instructions by picking up the items. Yet the narrator promptly states that it is "David" who "took" them (v. 12). That discontinuity in the participant references marks this second usage as a +PRINCIPAL FOR AGENT+ conventional metonym. (It goes without saying that a leader of David's standing would not carry such implements himself; that is what subordinates are for.) It highlights that Abishai undertook the audacious act in his capacity as David's agent—and thus David bears the responsibility.

• In Judg 16:19, Delilah—by apparent pre-arrangement—summons an *'iš* ("agent") to cut off Samson's hair while he is sleeping on her lap (*wa-tegallaḥ*; "she had him cut off," NJPS). That it is the unnamed agent who does the actual cutting is implied both by the situation (Delilah herself can hardly move without awaking Samson) and by the agent's very presence on the scene (why otherwise is this character necessary?).[50] But the agent's action is narrated via a feminine verbal inflection, which attributes the deed to Delilah. That discontinuity in a reference to participants marks this usage as a +PRINCIPAL FOR AGENT+ conventional metonym. It expresses that the agent has done the dastardly deed on behalf of his principal. (Compare the metonym of Hanun with the same verb but an elided agent in 2 Sam. 10:4 // 1 Chr 19:4.)

• A leader who is about to ride in a chariot does not actually hitch the horses to that chariot; normally it goes without saying that a subordinate does so (cf. 2 Kgs 9:21; commonplace #13). Thus the narrator may attribute that action to the superior: *wa-ye'sor yosep merkabto* (Gen 46:29; literally, "Joseph hitched his chariot," which is a metonymy meaning "Joseph's subordinate hitched Joseph's chariot at his command";

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[50] For the collocation *qara' 'ish* as the summoning of an agent to carry out a specific task on one's behalf, see also Exod. 2:7; 36:2; Josh 4:4; Isa. 46:11.

"Joseph ordered his chariot" [NJPS]; see also Exod 14:6). Similarly, the character Elijah employs this usage when addressing King Ahab (1 Kgs 18:44–45). These are all metonymies.

• When King Saul commands his son Jonathan to have David arrested: *šelaḥ we-qaḥ 'oto 'elai*, lit. "send and take him to me" (1 Sam 20:31), the second imperative verb actually refers to Jonathan's agent(s) in terms of Jonathan as principal (subordinated in turn to his father). This is a metonymic usage. Hence NJPS renders: "have him brought to me."

• Actions may be attributed to a particular group where logic dictates that the group's delegates or leaders are actually carrying it out. In such cases, the principal is not an individual but a group. In other words, the agents are designated metonymically in terms of the principal whom they represent. Examples include: Num 15:36 ("the whole community" = executioners); 21:21 ("Israel" = Moses); 32:2 ("the Gadites and the Reubenites" = a delegation thereof); Josh 7:25 ("all Israel" = executioners); Jud 11:19 ("Israel" = Moses).

• Likewise, principals may refer to their agent's accomplishment as if it were their own. Thus in Gen 21:30, Abraham says, "I dug this well"—whereas 26:15 indicates that it was his *'abadim* ("servants") who did the actual digging. Similarly, in Judg 8:19–20, Gideon says to two captive Midianite kings, "If you had spared [my brothers], I would not kill you," whereupon he directs his son Jether to carry out the announced execution. Thus Gideon had referred to his agent's (intended) action as if it were his own.

• Commonly the principal is already the discourse topic and metonymically gets credit for a deed as a matter of ultimate responsibility or initiative. For example: "David attacked the Philistines and subdued them" (2 Sam 8:1; similarly 1 Sam 23:5); obviously he did not accomplish this feat alone. Likewise, we are told that within a 16-day period, "King Solomon offered as sacrifices 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep" (2 Chr 7:5 // 1 Kgs 8:63), before the verse clarifies that "King Solomon" was actually a metonym for "the king and all the people" (ibid.; NJPS). Similarly, in Genesis 24, we are told that Abraham's chief servant "takes ten camels" laden with goods (v. 10) and upon arrival "makes them kneel" (v. 11), but only later are the subordinates (*anašim*) mentioned (v. 32) who actually have undertaken those actions at the chief servant's behest.

• Also common are instances in which the militia is representing the nation on the battlefield, and the actors are referred to as *kol yisra'el* or *benei yisra'el*.

#2 Principals can delegate an errand by stating the desired outcome, thus authorizing the agent to improvise and negotiate as needed.

• This follows from the nature of agency: as the agent operates (often remotely), issues may arise, so delegation of authority is necessary to ensure good results. (Of course, the degree of delegation can vary greatly, depending upon the task, the situation, and the agent's trustworthiness.)

• An exemplar is Jos 2:1, in which Joshua dispatches secret agents (*'anašim meraggelim*) with these instructions: *leku re'u 'et-ha-'aretz we-'et yeriḥo* ("Go, reconnoiter the region of Jericho"; NJPS). In the process, the agents consider themselves empowered to negotiate an agreement with Rahab to preserve her family—an agreement that is then considered binding upon the Israelites not only during the conquest but forever after.

• In addition to the examples of delegation listed in the table, see also 2 Sam 11:19–21, 25; 18:21, 23; 2 Kgs 9:17. (Even so, this list is not meant to be exhaustive.)

• Meier observes how extant evidence shows that messaging often required the agent to improvise in order for the mission to succeed: "The simple delivery of a message need not exhaust the messenger's responsibility, for it could also include defending and explicating that message's claims and veracity before a reluctant or incredulous listener" (*The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World*, p. 208). "The task of responding to questions about a message moves the messenger into the realm of the diplomat, where his central task lies in responding to unanticipated issues in a manner which would please the sender" (p. 205). "The questioning of a messenger was . . . a necessary [and expected] aspect of long distance communication" (p. 244).

• An instance of messaging that includes delegating an outcome is 2 Sam 11:25, where after dictating the precise words of a message, King David also directs his messenger to "encourage" the recipient.

• Any agent who appears to be improvising was presumably delegated to do so.

#3 Agents are typically identified by others in terms of their principal, and they typically self-identify in that way.

• This follows from the nature of agency: the agent is subordinate to the principal.

• The principal's identity generally matters more than that of the agent.

• The principal is generally of higher social rank.

• Regarding a *mal'ak*, "his significance derives not from who he is, but from who his superior is"—*TDOT*.

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- To put the matter in a broader context, we must note that the initial question of a person's affiliation applied to individuals regardless of whether were acting as agents, because everyone was considered to represent their corporate household (*beyt 'ab*; Gen 24:23–24; 2 Sam 1:8, 13; 2 Kgs 10:13). Ancient Israel was a group-oriented society. So a question of affiliation was always raised—but in the case of agents, they would generally answer in terms of their principal (if their activity was not surreptitious).

#4 A narrator may designate agents specifically via a noun of agency plus a genitive that names their principal.

- This commonplace is a subset of the preceding entry.

- This linguistic usage follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency.

- Every agent has a principal, by definition.

- By "a noun of agency" I mean a noun whose meaning relates the agent to the principal, such as *mal'ak* ("messenger"), *'ebed* ("servant/slave"), *na'ar* ("squire/lackey"), or *iš* ("agent").

- The addition of a genitive further designates the agent in terms of the principal, as "*X*'s agent," where *X* represents the principal's name. For example: *mal'akhei yiptaḥ* ("Jephthah's messengers"), Jud 11:13.

- Messengers (in particular) do not show up on the scene and carry out a mission without having been explicitly dispatched by their principal to do so. This follows from the messaging script; and it remains true even when the narrative does not depict a dispatch scene.

- When a character is designated as a *mal'ak Yhwh*, it means by default that this figure is an agent of *Yhwh*—and thus distinct from *Yhwh*—and also that *Yhwh* has dispatched this agent on a mission. (This is not some vague character that just happens to be called a *mal'ak*.)

#5 When the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it can be assumed (i.e., normally goes without saying) that upon arrival, messengers expeditiously name their principal.

- This use of ellipsis follows from the conceptual script that underlies messaging. Not surprisingly, biblical narration of a messaging event always omits at least some steps in the messaging process. It may even omit mention of the messenger(s) altogether (if the focus is on the message's content or the simple fact of long-distance transmission). See, for example, Gen 31:4; 38:25; Num 16:12; 1 Kgs 20:4; Neh 2:19–20 (cf. 6:1–8).

- Meier (*Messengers*, pp. 179–91) likewise notes that "self-identification is necessary for adequate communication" (p. 181) before concluding that "messengers in some fashion tend to identify the individual who sent the message" as part of their introduction (p. 191).

- The construction *wa-yišlaḥ* [*peloni*] . . . *lei'mor* ("[so-and-so] sent [someone] . . . to say [as follows]"—that is, using 3rd-person singular or plural references to the principal, but without necessarily mentioning the agent[s] explicitly)—is used forty times to depict human-to-human messaging. In the narratives that employ this formula, the message's recipients always promptly act as though they know its source. Yet the fact that the messenger has identified the principal is never stated either by the narrator or in the message content as quoted. Rather, it is present by ellipsis. See Num 21:21; 22:5; Josh 10:3–4; 10:6; Jud 9:31; 11:12, 17; 16:18; 20:12; 1 Sam 6:21; 16:22; 2 Sam 3:12, 14; 13:7; 15:10; 1 Kgs 5:16, 22; 12:3; 15:18; 21:14; 2 Kgs 3:7; 5:8, 10; 6:9; 10:1, 5; 14:9; 16:7; 18:14; 19:9; Isa 37:9; Jer 36:14; 37:3; Amos 7:10; Neh 6:2; 2 Chr 2:2; 16:2; 25:17, 18; 35:21. A banner example is the messaging to Balaam in Numbers 22. The content of King Balak's message in verse 5 does not mention his name; and the emissaries are said to tell Balaam only *dibrei balaq* ("Balak's words"). So how is it that Balaam is able to correctly state who sent him that message (v. 10)? It goes without saying that his visitors have identified themselves as Balak's emissaries.

- Another exemplar is Josh 2:3–7, which reads: *Wa-yišlaḥ melek yeriḥo 'el raḥab lei'mor: hoṣi'i ha-'anašim ha-ba'im 'elayik* . . . ("The king of Jericho sent [deputies] to Rahab, saying: 'Bring out the agents who came to you . . .'"; v. 3). The deputies' very existence goes without saying (even as Rahab addresses them in the second-person plural in verse 5) until verse 7, whereupon they are designated as *'anašim* ("agents"). Yet surely they have immediately disclosed to her that their stated message comes from the king. For both the notice that Rahab promptly hides her guests from those agents (v. 4) and her verbal response to them (vv. 4–5) show that Rahab somehow knows that her interlocutors are the king's henchmen. It goes without saying that they identified themselves as such to her.

- Aside from the *lei'mor* formula, there are many other instances in which messengers' self-identification is present by ellipsis. Consider the messengers who are sent to take someone back to the principal: In Gen 20:2, how do Abraham and Sarah know that the messengers who show up to take her away were sent by King Abimelech? In 2 Sam 3:15, how do Paltiel and Michal know that the messenger(s) who show up to take her away were sent by King Ish-boshet? In 2 Sam 11:4 and 11:27, how does Bathsheba

know that the messengers who show up to take her away were sent by King David? In all of these cases, it goes without saying that the messengers made a convincing case that they were acting under color of authority, so that no one would construe their action as kidnapping and put up resistance.

- In 2 Sam 19:15, we are told that the Judahites send a message to King David after the catastrophic failure of his son Absalom's coup d'état: *Wa-yišleḥu 'el ha-melek, šub 'attah we-kol 'abadeka* ("They sent [a message] to the king: 'Return—you and all your followers.'"). The next verse states that David begins his return to Jerusalem, which implies that he has received the message, knows its source, and thus concludes that it is safe to return. What goes without saying includes the very existence of one or more messengers and their delivery of the message, not to mention their self-identification upon arrival.

- The main exception that proves the rule may be the well-known, so-called messenger formula *koh 'amar peloni* ("Thus says so-and-so"). Why state this formula in the narrative, if the speaker's identity is already known to the text's audience, and its disclosure to the recipient can go without saying? That situation is precisely what makes this formula "marked" language—conspicuous by its presence and thus bearing added implications. In other words, the narration's report of this formula must be pragmatically motivated. My provisional analysis of the contexts of usage suggests that this formula is mentioned in order to highlight that the message is *surprising* or that it *clashes with the recipient's will*.[52]

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[52] My hypothesis is twofold: (*1*) When the message is *surprising*, the narration is motivated to precede it with the formula *koh 'amar peloni* for dramatic effect. This includes cases such as Joseph's disclosure to his father that he is alive and well (Gen 45:9); a professional prophet's explanation of his unusual prop (1 Kgs 22:11); and King Cyrus's announcement to end the Jews' exile and rebuild their Temple (Ezra 1:2). (*2*) When the message *involves a (potential) clash of wills* between sender and recipient, the formula highlights that conflict by emphasizing the sender's identity. Usage includes cases such as Jacob's message to Esau in the face of the latter's expected opposition (Gen 32:5); a new, harsher directive to the Israelite slaves (Exod 5:10); and King Solomon's exchange with Joab, who resists his death sentence (1 Kgs 2:30).

Most telling are the instances in which *koh 'amar peloni* is not recounted consistently throughout a given exchange. For example, it is not mentioned when Balak first attempts to hire Balaam (Num 22:5–6), but it is included in his second attempt (v. 16), following Balaam's initial refusal. Here the clash of wills becomes salient. Similarly, the formula is not quoted in Jephthah's initial query to the Ammonite king (Jud 11:12), but only in his subsequent demurral after the king's demand of satisfaction (v. 15). Again, at this point a clash of wills becomes salient.

- Another exception that proves the rule are some of the cases where the storytelling spotlights the *receive and memorize the dictated message* stage of the messaging script (see Appendix 6; normally, this stage is present only by ellipsis). In Gen 32:5; 45:9; Exod 3:13; and 1 Sam 25:6, the principal instructs the messenger(s) to state promptly in whose name that message is being delivered, before relating the message's content.

- Yet another exception that proves the rule is one of the few cases where the storytelling spotlights the *arrive–gain audience–announce principal–deliver message* stages of the messaging script (see Appendix 6). Abraham's steward, while serving as a messenger in Haran, announces his intention to disclose his errand to his hosts in Haran (Gen

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Conversely, the formula introduces an initial confrontational message from the cis-Jordanian Israelites to their trans-Jordanian brethren (Jos 22:16), but not the latter's appeasing reply (v. 22). And the formula introduces both of the extreme demands sent by King Ben-Hadad of Aram to the besieged King Ahab in Samaria (1 Kgs 20:3, 5), but not the latter's subservient replies (vv. 4, 9). (The fact that it then does not introduce Ben-Hadad's oath [v. 10] or Ahab's continued refusal to submit [v. 11] can be attributed to a quickening pace of narration that reflects the antagonists' rising tempers, or simply because their dispute is by this point no longer in question.) In such cases, the formula is reported only in order to highlight a clash of wills.

Likewise, the narrator uses this same formula when recounting something scandalous to the text's audience: to report the slander of King David by Shimei son of Gera (2 Sam 16:7), and to report David's bizarre reaction to Absalom's death (ibid., 19:1). Such usage by the narrator is both rare and unnecessary, which supports my contention that *koh 'amar peloni* is employed expressively also in the narration of the content of messages.

I have not yet investigated whether surprising or confrontational messages are reported even *without* using this formula. That step is necessary before this hypothesis can be considered valid.

Compare Samuel A. Meier's analysis in his monograph *Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible* (NY: Brill, 1992), pp. 273–98, 321. Meier does not consider the impact of the underlying messaging script on narrative convention, nor the possibility of pragmatic motivation for the only occasional citation of the formula *koh 'amar Yhwh*. Hence he is forced to adopt rather limited conclusions: "If the phrase *koh 'amar Yhwh* is supposed to provide the credentials for God's spokesperson, . . . other factors seem to be complicating the picture" (p. 277); "there is no speech form for the introduction of messages in the Hebrew Bible that unequivocally points to messenger activity" (p. 278); "one must conclude that [the phrase in question] is an optional narrative feature that biblical storytelling found largely irrelevant for the purposes of its art" (p. 279); "the formula is simply used to make citations of others' words" (p. 284); and "an apparent emphatic (because deictic) force . . . could account for its use in the prophets" (p. 289).

24:33); he then opens his delivery by stating his relationship to his principal: *'ebed 'abraham 'anoki* (v. 34).

• The convention that messengers self-identify in terms of their principal is known also outside the Bible. For example, it is seen in the answer given to the recipient's initial question in the Babylonian tale "The Poor Man of Nippur": the question "Who are you, my lord . . . ?" receives the reply "The king—your lord—sent me, to . . ." Here the messenger is actually an impostor, which is all the more telling: he must be attempting to adhere to a convention, so as to pass himself off as a real envoy. See Benjamin R. Foster, ed. and transl. *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* [Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1996], p. 831, ll. 87–91 (punctuation adapted).

• Mari's resident ambassador in Babylon (ca. 2000 BCE) gave an account of the arrival of a messenger from his city, whom he accompanied. It began with a formal announcement of the messenger's arrival: "We entered the presence of [the king]. The salutation and the verbal commission [credentials] were made [known]. We went out." He goes on to say that it was not until evening that he actually delivered the content of the message itself (Munn-Rankin, pp. 102–103, citing ARMT II 23).

• An emissary sent by King Shulgi of Sumer (fl. 2000 BCE) wrote back to his master to report a breach of protocol: "When I came to the gate of the palace, no one took notice of the greetings of my king; those who were sitting did not rise [and] did not bow down." In other words, it was customary for an emissary to begin by announcing whom he was representing, and to bear greetings from the principal (Meier, pp. 137–38).

• Diplomatic envoys often send ahead advance notice of their approach by runner to the recipient; it often included a summary report of their mission (Munn-Rankin, p. 107; Meier, p. 136).

• Perhaps divine messengers (angels) were supposed to be visibly recognizable as such. In 2 Sam. 24:17, David appears to recognize a *mal'ak Yhwh* on sight, for he immediately prays to "*Yhwh*" while this angel was engaged in a task that did not warrant announcing his principal or otherwise speaking directly to David. Similarly, in the Aqhat epic, found at Ugarit, when a god visits the hero Danil, the latter clearly identifies the approaching figure as a deity. It is not stated how Danil knows this.

• (Extant sources from the ancient Near East seem generally silent on the question of whether professional messengers—particularly when in the employ of a monarch— wore a uniform or insignia that made them recognizable by sight. One royal messenger crossing Palestine circa 1400 BCE was said to recognizable as such, due to the messenger bag that was slung around his neck [Meier, p. 60]. And various extant

instructions that once directed local officials to stop, detain, capture, or kill enemy messengers seem to presume that they can be recognized as such—yet that supposed ability might simply be a matter of suspecting any foreigner who is on the road. Similarly, Elijah's ability to intercept the king's messengers [1 Kgs 18:7; 2 Kgs 1:6] may be attributed to his clairvoyant powers as God's exemplary human agent, rather than to their visible features.)

#6 A narrator (or speaker) may call a messenger by the principal's name (or epithet) while the mission is underway.

• This linguistic usage follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency. (This usage is a special case of commonplace #1.)

• According to the LCCM Theory of the cognitive linguist Vyvyan Evans—which is the most sophisticated and integrated model of linguistic meaning that I know of—the Israelite audience would have processed a metonym as follows: After the agent has been the topic of discourse, this predication about the principal's name (technically, about the lexical concept that is behind the name) creates a clash in terms of the tracking of participant references. Prompted to resolve the clash in order to make sense of the narrative, the mind searches in its knowledge base among the less fundamental but still associated knowledge about the principal—and recalls that the latter is being represented by an agent. This agent becomes the "figurative target" as the principal is identified as the "figurative vehicle" that is used to refer to that agent. The cognitive model that is activated is AGENT; and because the metonymy of +AGENT FOR PRINCIPAL+ is both well entrenched in Israelite society and salient, it comes readily to mind. See Evans, *How Words Mean*, esp. pp. 295–97.

• Another instance involving messengers (in addition to the example discussed in the main paper) is Num 20:14–20:

> **Moses** sent *mal'akim* (messengers) to the **king of Edom**: "Thus says your brother **Israel**: . . . . Allow us, then, to cross your country. . . ." But **Edom** answered **him**, "You shall not pass through us. . . ." *Benei yisra'el* (**The Israelites**) said to **him**, "We will keep to the beaten track. . . . We ask only for passage on foot. . . ." But **he** said, "You shall not pass through!"
>
> (NJPS, adapted)

The actual negotiation with the king, which is taking place in Edom's capital, is conducted by *Moses' messengers*. But as expressed, this passage contains three metonyms—presumably because the outcome of this exchange was of national

import.[53] The present commonplace is evinced when the narrator designates Moses' messengers in terms of their nation: *Benei yisra'el* (v. 19).

- Yet another metonymic treatment of messengers is in Joshua 9. Their principal is designated at the episode's opening as *yoševei gib'on*, "the inhabitants of Gibeon" (v. 4); but the envoys who are then dispatched from Gibeon are referenced without a distinct designation, via a string of past narrative verbs whose inflections make literal anaphoric reference to the principal: "they for their part . . . set out. . . . They went to Joshua . . . and said to him" (vv. 4–6; NJPS). And in verse 7 the narrator refers to those envoys in terms of the Canaanite group whom they are representing: *ha-ḥiwwi*, "the Hivites." This treatment highlights the national-level import of the envoys' mission— for both peoples (see v. 27).

- The use of metonymy is similarly subtle in another case, when we are told that after Jacob's death, Joseph's sons send him a message (Gen 50:15–17), and that Joseph is moved to tears as he hears it (v. 17). Logically, one messenger was actually speaking in order to deliver that message, yet the narrator references the message's delivery via a plural pronominal suffix (*be-dabberam 'elaw*). In other words, the agent is referenced in terms of his principal—namely, the aforementioned brothers. This usage functions to underscore that it is on the brothers' behalf that this messenger is articulating an emotional and perhaps manipulative appeal.

- The convention that a narrator can refer to the messenger in terms of the principal is confirmed by the fact that biblical characters are depicted as doing so—as demonstrated by Moses in Num 20:14. In his framing of the initial message, Moses refers to himself via a metonym, his nation's eponymous ancestor ("Thus says your brother Israel"). Moses thus underscores that he is acting in the capacity of his people's representative (even as he functions as the principal of the messengers whom he has dispatched).

- This commonplace accords with Fabry's general conclusion in *TDOT*: "As is the case in the secular sphere . . . the identification of the party issuing the commission and the

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[53] Among all of Israel's neighbors, Edom played an outsized role in its history and sense of ethnic identity. This is evinced by its progenitor Esau's genealogical position as Jacob's elder twin (Gen 25:25; 1 Chr 1:34), and by the large amount of attention accorded to Edom's own genealogies in Genesis and in Chronicles. The reasons for such special treatment are no longer clear. See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB), Comment to chapter 36; Gary Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9* (AB), s.v. Notes to 1:34; see also Deut 2:4–6; 2 Sam 8:13–14; 1 Kgs 11:14–22; Lam 4:21–22; Ps. 137:7.

messenger is customary." And so also James Ross: "A messenger is to be treated as if he were his master. . . . [This] may . . . account for the occasional confusion between Yahweh and his *mal'ak*." See Ross, "The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger," in Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson, eds., *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 98–107; here 101–102.

#7 A principal's message may be couched as if the principal were present at its delivery.

• This linguistic usage follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency.

• In 1 Kgs 20:5–6, King Ben-hadad spells out (via messengers) that when he had earlier stated (via those same messengers): "Your silver, gold, wives, and children—give them to me," it meant that his agents will be coming to seize them.

• In 2 Kgs 18:31, an Assyrian royal envoy states to a besieged Jerusalem: "Thus said the king of Assyria: Make your peace with me and come out to me" (NJPS), but the king himself is nowhere in the vicinity. By "me" he actually means his agents.

#8 Messengers may address the message's recipient as if the principal were speaking.

• This linguistic usage follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency.

• It presumes that the principal's identity is already known to the message's recipient (see above, #5).

• The convention of speaking for one's principal in the first person can be considered a metonymy. As such, it is more than a simple substitution of terms. For example, when Joseph's steward says "he will be my slave" (Gen 44:10), the "my" does not refer to himself, nor to his master in general, but specifically to his master as having dispatched him to arrest these travelers. Similarly, the "Me" in "the outcry that has reached Me" (Gen 18:21) does not refer simply to God in general, but specifically to God as having dispatched agents to hold human beings accountable.

• As Joshua's spies negotiate with Rahab (Josh 2:14b, 18–19), their first-person plural references move seamlessly back-and-forth between speaking about themselves and speaking for the Israelite nation whom they are representing, and of which they are a part.

#9 Recipients who do not know the messenger would be prudent to verify credentials.

• It is possible that the visitor may not be an authorized agent; or the agent may exceed the authority that was granted.

- Assyriologists have adduced indirect evidence that government envoys traveled not only with a written version of the entrusted message but also with a formal document that accredited them to their host. Such credentials were demanded by the harbormaster of Byblos (Phoenicia), according to an ancient work of historical fiction about the envoy Wenamun, who came from Egypt (Meier, p. 141; Munn-Rankin, pp. 101–102).

- See also note 26.

#10 Recipients condition their deferential gestures and manner of speaking upon the social rank of the principal—not that of the messenger.

- These gestural and linguistic usages follow from the conceptual metonymy that under-lies agency.

- According to Sam Meier, in the Semitic ancient Near East "the messenger was received with due signs of respect exchanged between messenger and the one receiving him. Prostration was the mark of submission rendered to the relative superior (the messenger representing the sender in this capacity)" (*Messenger*, p. 160).

- In the ancient Near East, it was a normal sign of respect for the envoys' sender to receive them with alacrity (cf. Gen 24:29, 29:13). As the 20th-century commentator Rabbi Benno Jacob explains, "to meet an honored guest one hurries a shorter or longer distance according to his rank" (transl. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob).

#11 Recipients may respond to a message by addressing the messenger as a stand-in for the principal.

- This linguistic usage follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency.

- As Rahab speaks with Joshua's spies (Josh 2:9–13), her second-person plural refer-ences move seamlessly back-and-forth between addressing the two agents themselves and speaking to the entire Israelite nation whom they are representing, and of which they are a part.

#12 A recipient's treatment of a messenger is tantamount to treatment of the principal, in terms of showing respect or disrespect.

- This allocation of respect follows from the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency.

- In Genesis 24, the warm welcome that Laban shows to the traveler (v. 31) is a consequence of knowing that this stranger is Abraham's agent (as disclosed to him by Rebekah, v. 30; Laban's knowledge of this fact is assumed by commonplace #5 and confirmed by his invoking Abraham's personal deity).

- In 2 Samuel 10, the disrespect shown by the Ammonites to the Israelite envoys were considered by both sides to be a *casus belli* without question.

#13 The higher a person's social rank, the more likely that his/her actions (and communications) are carried out by their agents.

- In a hierarchical society, the higher your social status, the more subordinates you have—and the more communal responsibilities. This in turn makes it more likely that any given interaction with another party will be carried out via an agent, rather than in person.

#14 Whenever one person encounters another, they must establish their relative social rank. The social inferior must then display deference, via gestures and manner of speaking.

- If relative rank is not immediately established, how would you know whether to show deference—or expect to receive it?
- Showing proper respect enables you to get your needs and wishes met.
- Normally, one's body language (gestures) and manner of speaking are expected to be congruent, with regard to the level of deference that they convey. They are mutually reinforcing.
- On gestures of deference, see Gruber (1980).
- The gesture of bowing *to the ground* in front of someone is not only highly marked but potentially dangerous—it makes one physically vulnerable.
- Logic dictates that in ancient Israel, one did not ever intentionally make obeisance to anyone of lesser social rank. (It would mean a loss of face and therefore influence, and it would disrespect one's true superiors by cheapening the deference customarily shown toward them.)
- Denizens of the ancient Near East distinguished between making obeisance and a merely polite expression of deference. Gruber gives a general rule: "The lord-vassal language of master-subject shows that the verb denotes a posture of obeisance" (Gruber, p. 189).
- On deferential speech, see also Revell (1996): "The main effect of status on the language is seen in the convention that a speaker who is subordinate in status must use deferential language to persuade a status-marked addressee to act as he wishes, to accept criticism without taking offense, and so on" (p. 44). "Deferential forms are not usual where a formal social [superior-subordinate] relationship does not exist. . . .

However they may be used out of politeness, to render speech more acceptable to a stranger" (p. 269).

#15 Whenever there is a group, there is a hierarchy. Only one person is in charge. By default, that person represents the group to third parties.

• Given the hierarchical nature of Israelite society, a hierarchy is the default arrangement within a team of messengers. When such a team is depicted as speaking via a plural verbal inflection, it goes without saying (as the default understanding) that only one member of the team is actually speaking—on behalf of the whole team. The plural inflection is thus a partonymic metonymy: it refers to the speaker in terms of the group being represented.

• This applies to those members of the team who are on the same level in terms of social status. Meanwhile, the more subordinate members of a retinue may not be mentioned at all, or mentioned only as an afterthought (Gen 24:32).

• This narrative convention is basically a matter of logic, in light of the need for effective communication. When the narrator relates that three thousand Judahite militiamen negotiate with Samson (Judg 15:11–13), clearly they are not all speaking with him at once. Rather, he must be negotiating with one representative.

• In Ezek 9:1–11, Ezekiel beholds observes six divine agents, who are designated by God as *pequdei ha-'ir* and by the prophet as *'anašim*. One of those agents is in charge of the rest and speaks on their behalf.

• This narrative convention applies not only to messengers but to all speakers. Thus in Gen 24, it is Rebekah's brother Laban who is representing his family in the negotiations for her hand in marriage (vv. 29, 30, 33; in vv. 50 and 55 the initial singular verbal inflections underscore his spokesman status). Surely he is also the party doing the talking in the responses to the servant's request to depart immediately (vv. 57, 58). That is, he is referenced metonymically via plural inflections (*wa-yomeru*).

• The participant reference can shift from plural (*wa-yomeru*) to singular (*wa-yomer*) when the utterance applies especially to the speaker, as distinct from the rest of the team. Thus when Joseph's brothers make their second journey from Canaan to Egypt as their father's representatives, they are referred to consistently as *ha-'anašim* ("the agents") and via plural inflections (42:7, 10, 13; 43:18, 20, 28; 44:7)—until Joseph's ruse puts Benjamin at risk (Gen 44:12). At that point, the reference shifts to a compound subject with a singular verbal inflection: *wa-yabo' Yehudah we-'eḥaw*

(44:14). This construction spotlights Judah, for he is Benjamin's guarantor, which now becomes a salient distinction that sets him apart from the rest of his brothers.[54]

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[54] A similar shift in participant reference occurs in Genesis 19. Although in verses 12–17a the narration couches the messengers' interactions with Lot in the plural, in verses 17–21 singular inflections indicate that only one of those messengers is now negotiating with Lot over his family's fate. This shift in number seems to reflect a special concern of the party who is responsible for carrying out the messengers' mission, namely, that Lot is hindering the team from completing its task (v. 22).

Appendix 6: Ellipsis in Biblical Depictions of Human-to-Human Messaging

Here is the sequence of steps involved in the script for messaging in the ancient Near East, from the messenger's perspective: *Be selected as messenger • Be commissioned as messenger • receive and memorize the dictated message • be dispatched • leave • travel • locate recipient • arrive • gain audience • announce principal • deliver message • explain its import • absorb the response • take leave • return to the principal • report back.* (See Meier, *Messenger*; cited in Appendix 2.)

Only a few of those steps are mentioned in any single biblical episode that involves messaging—whether in the human or divine realm—but the rest are nonetheless present by ellipsis. For example, to describe the principal's dispatch of a messenger, the verb *šalaḥ* ("sent") or *qara'* ("summoned") is often used with an elided direct object; thus the messengers' very existence is assumed—not to mention their successful discharge of the mission (e.g., Gen 12:18; 27:42; 38:25; Josh 11:1). Equally compressed depictions describe only a message's dictation (Exod 18:6) or its receipt (Gen 34:5–7), or only the notice of a dispatch followed by the end result (Exod 9:7; 1 Sam 5:8, 11; 2 Sam 11:3). Just one or two such steps can represent the whole process, so the text's composer(s) need portray only what is most salient.[55]

In biblical narrative, when God operates via a *human* agent, the depiction of the dispatching stages is not uncommon (e.g., Moses in Exod 9:13; Samuel in 1 Sam 16:1–3; the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam 12:24b–25). However, when God operates via a *divine* agent, only rarely do we find explicit predication of the dispatching stages. Exceptions include Job 1:6–12 and 2:1–6, which make it clear that *Yhwh* and the *śaṭan* are distinct entities; and so also 1 Kings 22:22, in a prophet's vision regarding *Yhwh* and a *ruaḥ šeqer*.[56] (Dispatching of divine agents is meanwhile found in poetry, such as in Isa 41:27; Ps. 91:11; 103:20; 104:4; 105:17.) In other words, God's acts of selecting, commissioning, and instructing of divine agents mostly go without saying. In short, the Bible applies the "God operates via agents" motif mostly to *the human experience of message reception, and to the experience of being called to God's service.*

Ellipsis was used to depict messaging not only by the Bible's narrator and its characters, but also by the author of ostracon 24:18–19 found in Arad (ca. 600 BCE):

הנה שלחתי להעיד בכם הים

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[55] On 1 Kings 20 as a rich exemplar of various degrees of schematization in its narration of messaging, see Meier, *Messenger* (cited in Appendix 2), pp. 40–41.

[56] On 1 Kings 22:22, see Esther Hamori, "The Spirit of Falsehood," *CBQ* 72 [2010]: 15–30.

Take note: I have sent [this message via a messenger] to warn you today. (My transl.)

This instance confirms that ellipsis was a conventional part of ancient Hebrew discourse on messaging. Consequently, its use in the Bible would have been readily understood by the text's ancient audience.

Appendix 7: Metonymy in Biblical Depictions of Human-to-Human Messaging

Here is another instance in which an agency metonym opens a narrative account:

וַיִּמְעֲלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעַל בַּחֵרֶם וַיִּקַּח עָכָן . . . מִן־הַחֵרֶם . . .

> The **Israelites**, however, violated the proscription: **Achan** . . . took of that which was
> proscribed . . . (Josh 7:1; NJPS)

That is, the opening designation as "the Israelites" actually refers to only *one* of its members: Achan. The metonymy conveys the idea that he represents the entire nation in his culpability. As an agent in the field, his self-dealing violated an unspoken rule that agents should put their principal's interest ahead of their own.

The same usage of opening with a metonym occurs both in Josh 14:6 (in which *benei yehudah* appears to refer to Caleb, expressing that his petition is backed by his fellow Judites) and in Judg 1:22–24 (in which *beit yosef* in vv. 22–23 refers to *ha-šomerim* [NJPS "their patrols"] in v. 24).

Another biblical agency metonym—this time in speech rather than narration—is found in Ruth 4:17, *yullad ben le-naʿomi*, "A son is born to Naomi!" The neighbor-women are referring here to Naomi's agent, Ruth, who is the actual birth mother (as the speakers themselves have just stated in v. 15). The metonym succinctly expresses their claim that Ruth has acted in place of Naomi, by producing progeny who in turn will act as Naomi's "redeemer" in her old age (v. 15).

Appendix 8: On the Noun *'iš* as Denoting an Agent

As documented in the sources cited in note 29, the noun *iš* (or its functional plural, *'anašim*) is referentially relational; that is, it regards its referent in terms of its relationship to something else—typically another party, or the group of which that *iš* is a member. The basic meaning is roughly equivalent to the English noun "participant."

The agency use of *iš* is a specialized, intensive sense of this noun's basic meaning. It regards the referent as a "participant's participant"—that is, as an agent of one of the other participants. It occurs hundreds of times in the Bible.

This noun is often applied to agents of God within an agency frame (situation). A prominent example is: "Now Moses the *'iš* was very humble" (Num 12:3). There, Moses' authority as God's representative is being challenged by Miriam and Aaron; in that situational context, the title *ha-'iš* refers precisely to his office as God's agent. The title *'iš* is used elsewhere for Moses in his capacity as God's agent (Exod 11:3). It is a designation for Joseph as God's agent (Ps 105:17) as well as for the divine agents who are encountered in the visions of Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel (Ezek 9:2–3; 10:2, 6–7; 40:3–6; Zech 1:8–10; 2:5–6; Dan 9:21; 10:5–6, 18–20; 12:6–7). Furthermore, the title *'iš* *'elohim* ("God's agent") appears dozens of times in the Bible.

In the 14th-century-BCE Amarna letters, the Akkadian term *amilu* (cognate to Hebrew *'iš*) was employed as a designation in agency contexts. On that basis, Alan Crown speculated in 1974 that "it is most likely that the biblical Hebrew word *'iš* is . . . used on occasion with the sense of . . . agent for another" ("An Alternative Meaning for *'iš* in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 24/1, p. 110). For a similar speculation, see Anton Jirku, *Zeitschrift für die altestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1949), p. 319, Notes.

Because the word *'anašim* is referentially relational, its deployment always prompts in the audience's mind a question: How are these referents being regarded as participating in the scene? In relation to which group or other party are they being regarded? (Expressed in terms of Cognitive Grammar, that group or other party is the base against which this noun profiles its referent; see Ellen van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies*, pp. 117–18.) In Genesis 18:2, the cognitive search provoked by this noun's semantics joins with the cognitive search that is already underway in the audience's mind—namely, to ascertain how the condition stated in verse 1a is being satisfied.

Compare the similar situation and terminology in Josh 5:13, where Joshua encounters a sword-wielding *'iš*; there the noun likewise expresses the view from Joshua's perspective. He then poses a question of relationship: *Ha-lanu 'attah 'im le-*

ṣareinu? ("Are you ours—or our enemy's?"). That is, which party are you representing? His question shows that he regards this *'iš* as an agent of as-yet-unidentified principal. Surely the question that he poses as a character was posed simultaneously by the text's ancient audience.

In both cases, one might object that if "agent" were indeed meant by *'iš* (as opposed to merely a "participant" in the encounter), the narrator could easily have used a more explicit synonym, such as *mal'ak Yhwh,* as in Gen 16:7 or Judg. 2:1—or even *mal'ak* alone. This supposition overlooks that *'iš* is Hebrew's basic-level term for an agent, and as such is the most efficient way to establish a situation of representation. Furthermore, *'anašim* seems to serve as a literary theme-word (*leitwort*) in this Genesis pericope, for it occurs ten times: three times in Genesis 18, and seven times in Genesis 19.

Appendix 9: Selected Further Analysis of Genesis 18

V. 1a: Wa-yeira' Yhwh 'elaw

Here we must ask: do the semantics of this Hebrew verb allow for an agent to function as an intermediary? Or to put it another way, is a figurative reading *semantically accepta-ble*? (The question is crucial, for not all verbs do allow for such a transfer of action! At least not in English; see Appendix 12.)

The answer is a definite yes, for what is denoted by *ra'ah* in its *niph'al* stem can be properly applied to an agent, even when that agent is designated in terms of the principal. This usage is attested once in the human domain and three more times in the divine domain. In these four cases, unlike in Gen 18:1–2, the more specific ("literal") designation precedes the metonymic designation in the text.

Here is a summary table of the four supporting passages; discussion follows.

Verb:	*leira'ot*	*nir'ah*	*yeira'eh*	*nir'ah*
Metonymic designation:	*kol yiśra'el*	*Yhwh*	*Yhwh*	*Yhwh*
(citation)	(Deut 31:11)	(2 Chr 3:1)	(Gen 22:14)	(Exod 3:16)
Specific designation:	*kol zekurka*	*mal'ak Yhwh*	*mal'ak Yhwh*	*mal'ak Yhwh*
(citation)	(Deut 16:16)	(1 Chr 21:16)	(Gen 22:11)	(Exod 3:2)

In the human domain, Deut 31:11 details Moses' instruction for what to do during the Feast of Booths in the sabbatical year:

> when *kol yiśra'el* (**all Israel**) comes *leira'ot* (**to appear**) before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of *kol yiśra'el* (**all Israel**). (NJPS, adapted)

The referent of the expression *kol yiśra'el* at the start of this verse is different than its referent when it appears again at the end. For in the latter case, the referent includes "men, women, and children"—as spelled out in the next verse; in contrast, the start of this verse alludes to 16:16, which stated:

> Three times a year — [including] on the Feast of Booths — *kol zekurka* (**all your males**) *yeira'eh* (**shall appear**) before the Lord your God in the place that He will choose. (NJPS, adapted)

This equation tells us that the nation's males represent the whole populace in the duty of visiting the sanctuary during festivals. To return to 31:11, it means that the expression *kol yiśra'el* at the start of that verse is a conventional metonym that regards the nation's males in terms of their representative function. In this metonymy, the infinitive *leira'ot* (which is *ra'ah* in the *niph'al* stem) is used non-literally: it applies literally only to the

agent (the males), while the metonymy credits their principal ("all Israel") with the act of "appearing" at the sanctuary.

As for the divine domain, consider the usage of the same verb in the Book of Chronicles. In 2 Chr 3:1, an earlier sighting by King David of a *mal'ak Yhwh* (1 Chr 21:16 ff.) is equated by the narrator with David's apperception of the deity (*Yhwh . . . 'ašer nir'ah le-dawid*). It was the agent about whom it was said that David *wa-yar'* ("saw")—but the *nir'ah* ("being perceived") was credited to *Yhwh* as the principal.[57]

See also the usage of the same verb (*yeira'eh*) in Gen 22:14, in which the angel who had contacted Abraham (v. 11) is referenced in terms of the principal who presumably had dispatched him (see Appendix 10, s.v. Genesis 22).

See also the metonym in Exod 3:16, in which God instructs Moses to tell the Israelite elders that *Yhwh* "appeared" (*nir'ah*) to him, whereas the narrator had related that it was actually an agent who did so (*wa-yeira' mal'akh Yhwh 'elaw*; v. 2).

To return to Gen 18:1, the discourse seems to promote a focus on Abraham's apperception by the manner in which the text references him across the two clauses in this verse. The first word of the second clause is a pronoun (*we-hu'*); as the text's audience searches for an antecedent, the logic of the situation prompts the text's audience to skip over the two closest possible ones, namely *Mamre* and then *Yhwh*, to settle on the pronominal suffix in the second word (*'elaw*), which in turn refers back to Abraham in 17:26. This deployment of pronouns thus presumes that the audience's attention is already on Abraham and remains on him.

V. 1b: we-hu' yošeb

A discourse-pragmatic observation: The "*waw* + pronoun" opening of this clause further shifts the discourse topic—that is, the audience's attention—from God to Abraham. Abraham becomes the new starting point for whatever happens next. The spotlight is on him—and therefore on the now-expected moment of his apperception of the divine.

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[57] The commentators Arnold Ehrlich (1914; *Randglossen*, 355–56), Wilhelm Rudolph (1955) and Jacob M. Myers (1965) both construed this verb literally and therefore found it problematic, given that 1 Chronicles 21 does not report God's presence in the scene. Ralph W. Klein (2006) accounts for the anomaly as follows: "when David offered sacrifices and called upon Yahweh, it was Yahweh who answered him (1 Chr 21:26, 28)."

And a second discourse-pragmatic observation: This circumstantial clause not only sets the scene,[58] but also—by virtue of its reliance upon a participle—establishes its depicted state of affairs as *persisting during the main action that was just mentioned*. Thus, the expected moment of God's becoming apparent to Abraham's mind—that is, of Abraham's experiencing a sudden connection to God (his "*wa-yeira* moment," if you will)—is situated here as occurring *while he is still sitting*. According to the grammar of the narration, Abraham recognizes that God is communicating with him *even before he gets up*.

To state the grammatical point more formally: Because the participle *yošeb* is the predicate of a verbless clause (or as some scholars would put it, because this participle offers *comment* on the clause's *topic*), its force is durative. In other words, *yošeb* describes a state of affairs that is "contemporaneous with the main action" (*IBHS* § 37.6b; GKC § 116*o*; 141*e*). For confirmation, see the similar circumstantial clauses in Gen 14:13; Jud 3:20; 13:9; and 1 Sam 22:6—all of which logically require a contemporaneous interpretation.

Most interpreters and translators appear to have construed this clause as giving background information—that is, as if it had a perfect (finite) verb, rather than a participle. Apparently they have done so under the presumption that if Abraham indeed recognized his visitors as God's agents at this juncture, surely the text would have said so more clearly. However, the present paper's thesis invalidates such a presumption and thus resolves the crux.

Similarly, many interpreters are inclined to construe verse 1 as an overview statement that introduces the whole story of the visit. This view seems at odds not only with the force of verse 1b as explained above, but also with the conventional messaging script—in which the recipient is aware of the principal before receiving a message. The text's audience would presume such a script unless the narrator indicated otherwise—and not via a narrative past verb (as in v. 1a) but rather by a means similar to the circumstantial clause in 22:1—which is not the case in this story.

Contrary to some classical midrashic interpretations, in a plain-sense reading there is no narrative break between verse 1a and verse 2, for verse 1b is the circumstantial clause that connects them. (Verse 2 is hardly comprehensible without v. 1b as

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[58] Discourse-oriented scholars such as Robert Longacre, Barry Bandstra, and David Baker classify verbless (including participial) clauses as being "off the main line of the narrative." See, e.g., Longacre's *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), p. 79, diagram 3.

background.) As the 19th-century commentator Rabbi Meir Malbim explains (at 18:1), this reading is consistent with the standard exegetical principle that when a general statement (here, v. 1a) is followed by the description of a specific action (here, v. 2), the latter specifies what the former referred to.

The particular setting that is described—namely, while "he was sitting at the entrance of the tent as the day grew hot" (NJPS)—accords well with the observed fact that spiritual experiences tend to occur suddenly and unexpectedly, and in liminal spaces.

V. 2: šelošah ’anašim

It is not necessary to presume that Abraham's visitors are angels; they could be humans with superpowers that establish their credentials as agents of the divine, much like Elijah or Elisha. Narratives about the latter demonstrate that magical realism was part of the biblical composers' repertoire. But really, how else does an agent establish that God is their principal—i.e., that this encounter is a religious experience? Logically, God's divine agents needed to establish their authority just like any human bearer of a message or report. However, this need was particularly salient during the attempted transfer of a spiritual experience to the mundane political realm (Exod. 4:1, regarding Moses; Deut 18:15–22, regarding a future prophet; Jud 13:2–7, regarding Samson's future mother; 1 Kgs 13:18, regarding a lying prophet). Presumably Samson's future mother has some cultural reason to believe that a divine messenger looks different from a human one (Jud 13:6). Regardless of whether Abraham's visitors are divine beings, the audience is probably meant to presume that there was something obviously special about them from the start.

V. 2: niṣavim ‘alaw

Although it is not used exclusively for agents, this participle is known to denote behavior that is characteristic for agents—particularly those on an errand (Abraham's servant, Gen 24:13, 43; Moses and Aaron, Exod 5:20; 7:15; an angel, Num 22:23, 31, 34; cf. Joseph's servants, Gen 45:1; doulas, 1 Sam 4:20; Saul's retinue, 1 Sam 22:6, 7; and Saul's guards, 1 Sam 22:17). Upon arrival at the destination, waiting to gain an audience is a classic step in the messenger script (see Appendix 6). In other words, this predicate is part of the messaging frame (or if you prefer, the semantic field of agency). Consequently, the text's audience is confirmed in its conclusion that this clause's subject (*’anašim*) denotes agents.

V. 2: *wa-yar'* (second instance)

A lexical observation: This verb can denote recognition and understanding; see Gen 13:10 (recognizing a state of fecundity); Exod 32:5 (interpreting something heard); Jud 6:22 (interpreting what has vanished from view altogether); Jud 13:20 (interpreting something seen—but after the seeing itself was already reported in v. 19, as here; and followed, as here, by making obeisance, which confirms the referent's recognition of their own subordinate social rank); 2 Sam 15:27 (interpreting a situation that calls for a new arrangement); 2 Sam 18:27 (interpreting what is observed); 1 Kgs 19:3 in the Masoretic text (interpreting something heard); and Neh 4:8 (interpreting a state of preparedness). Even so, many contemporary scholars take this verb, when God is its object, as designating literal seeing, even if the interaction as described is explicitly nonvisual. (Apprehensions in a dream or vision should not count, because by definition they are idiosyncratic—they represent theophany as only this character experiences it.) So, e.g., Kugel, *God of Old*, pp. 98–99; however, he proceeds to conclude that such texts are not referring to "ordinary seeing" (pp. 102, 106).

A text-linguistic observation: This verb is conspicuously repeated here—it occurred already just six words earlier; and equally conspicuously, it is a clause unto itself; it has no syntactic complements. The text's audience is thus prompted to construe it as especially meaningful. This situation predisposes the audience to read it as confirming Abraham's recognition of God's agents as such. (So the commentator Rashi [1040?–1105]. So also R. Baḥya ben Asher [fl. ca. 1300], ad loc.: *we-hosip šenit lešon "wa-yar'" leba'er kiy hosip lir'ot be-'ayin haskel we-hitbonen ba-hem we-hikkir še-hem mal'akim,* "it adds the term *wa-yar'* the second time, to make clear that he continued to look thoughtfully; he reflected on them and realized that they were *mal'akim*." So also Nachmanides at v. 3.) That is: the previously announced "experience of the deity" has occurred. And it has occurred because three agents are doing just what agents normally do—which is to represent their principal.

Grammatically speaking, the "narrative past" verb form normally expresses temporal succession. But in this instance, such a construal would make no sense, because the same verb was just used on the narrative main line. The next most frequent meaning of this verb form is to express a consequence of what precedes. (See *IBHS* § 33.2.1a–b.) Because such a construal fits in this case, the audience would have no incentive to try out an even less frequent meaning, as it seeks to interpret this verse.

The alternative traditional construal of this second instance of *wa-yar'* is as a temporal indicator for what follows. So R. Saadia ben Joseph (10th century; paraphrasing

as *ka-'ašer ra'am*), ad loc.; NJPS "As soon as he saw them." But such usage seems farther from how this verb form normally functions—and therefore less likely. Arguably, too, a temporal indication would be more naturally expressed via a prepositional phrase, such as with an infinitive form (Gen 29:10; 32:3; 2 Sam 24:17; Jer 39:4; Est. 5:2).

Wa-yaroṣ liqra'tam

The implication that Abraham promptly recognizes the *'anašim* as God's agents (discussed in the main paper) most readily explains why in this verse and the following one Abraham signals his utter submission to these visitors, both physically and verbally. Given commonplace #14, the audience would understand that Abraham acted that way only because he was well aware of precisely whom these agents were representing.

On Abraham's rushing to greet the visitors, see commonplace #10 and commentary there.

Wa-yištaḥu 'arṣah

Given commonplace #14, the Israelite audience surely believed that only a fool would prostrate himself before three *unidentified* strangers.

According to Mayer Gruber, this kind of deep bowing, when combined with the deferential manner of speaking that follows, signals obeisance. But because Gruber did not grant that Abraham at this point already recognizes the agents as such, he classified this instance in contradiction with his classification criteria. See Mayer Gruber, *Aspects of Nonverbal Communication in the Ancient Near East* (1980).

As the 20th-century commentator Rabbi Benno Jacob explains, "[Abraham's] deep bow before God's messengers corresponds to falling on his face before God (17:3, 17)."

V. 3: 'Adonai

Some interpreters cite the Masoretic vocalization here (with *qamaṣ*, which is normally reserved for addressing the deity) to claim that Abraham recognizes one of the visitors as "God Himself." (Contrast Lot's usage in 19:2, which is written with a *pataḥ* vowel.) However, we cannot eliminate the possibility that the *qamaṣ* vowel here is simply an artifact of the disjunctive accent (in this case, a *rebiʻa*; cf. 19:18, with a *sop pasuq*). Although such a pausal form with this accent is rare, it is nonetheless attested (e.g., Gen 43:23).

Meanwhile, construing all three visitors as agents does not preclude the understanding that Abraham addresses them as if they were the deity (see commonplace #11).

In short, this word's vocalization plays no significant role as a piece of evidence in the present investigation.

Be-'eineka

The singular pronouns in Abraham's initial address indicate that he is addressing the chief agent. He can be presumed to be replying to the individual who has already addressed him, for we have established that the chief agent has already disclosed the identity of his principal (see commonplaces #5 and 15). Furthermore, the chief agent's identity as such would be evident from the agents' respective dress or demeanor (such as the chief agent's standing in front of the other two); see commonplace #14.

V. 5: Wa-eqḥah pat leḥem

Some interpreters cite Judg 13:16 to claim that it is a commonplace that angels do not eat; they then assert that Abraham's offer of food here implies that he does not yet recognize that these agents were sent by God. However, the ostensible commonplace has no basis, for the messenger in Judg 13:16 states only that he *will* not eat—not that he *cannot* do so. At any rate, that notion is clearly not applicable to this story, which goes on to relate that these visitors in fact do eat the food that is offered to them (Gen 18:8; 19:3).

Given all the marvelous things that biblical angels do, their eating should hardly be considered out of the question. And as discussed in note 26, these visitors may well be human beings.

V. 9: Wa-yo'meru 'elaw

This plural verbal inflection indicates a metonymy in its participant reference. For it goes without saying that only one individual—the chief agent—is actually speaking on behalf of all three (and on behalf of their principal); see commonplace #15.

V. 10: Wa-yo'mer šub 'ašub

The speaker—the chief agent—is now represented by a singular verbal inflection. Such a shift in participant reference occurs when the utterance applies only to the speaker, as opposed to the rest of the group. In this case, the shift is indeed consistent with the content of the utterance: the speaker claims that only he is going to be visiting Abraham and Sarah next year.

V. 14: Ha-yippale' me-Yhwh dabar

The third-person reference to the deity is more consistent with our view that the chief agent is speaking than with the conventional scholarly view that *Yhwh* is present in the scene and speaking.

V. 17: Wa-Yhwh 'amar . . .

The syntax indicates a background circumstance. There is no time stamp. The reported utterance (vv. 17–19) could have been part of God's instruction to the chief agent upon dispatching him. It would now be recalled as germane, in order to explain what the chief agent says and does next, as he proceeds to converse with Abraham. If so, this clause would be the only instance in Genesis 18 where *Yhwh* is not necessarily a metonym for one or more of God's agents.

V. 19: We-šameru derek Yhwh . . . le-ma'an hevi' Yhwh . . . 'ašer dibber

These third-person references to the deity are admittedly challenging to the interpretation offered in the preceding note. Perhaps the chief agent is being depicted metonymically as reflecting upon his mission.

Vv. 20–33: Wa-yo'mer Yhwh . . .

The narrator now continues the metonymy in verse 13 (discussed in the main paper) throughout the extended negotiation between Abraham and the chief agent in verses 20–33 (specifically in vv. 22, 26, and 33). As before, the narrator's designation of the chief agent as *Yhwh* is quite pointed: it does not refer simply to that agent in a general way, but rather to that agent as having said these particular things at this particular moment *in his principal's name*. That the character designated as *Yhwh* here and in v. 33 is actually the chief agent makes it unremarkable that he is meanwhile described as going (v. 16) and standing still (v. 22) and walking off (v. 33).

   This long conversation in verses 20–33 may well be the main point of the chief agent's visit to Abraham. Motivation for this visit is alluded to via the background report of a prior reflection (vv. 17–19), which implies that Abraham's suitability as an agent of God—with a mission of his own—is still being developed. Hence his principal (God) now seeks his reaction to Sodom's impending doom; the chief agent has been dispatched in order to probe Abraham's reaction. At issue is how Abraham will reconcile competing interests: loyalty to God as his master, versus loyalty to his nephew in Sodom. In short, whether Abraham's reasoning is self-serving. Abraham apparently passes the test, partly by his implicit willingness to sacrifice Lot and his family for the sake of greater justice.

(This episode thus foreshadows God's test of Abraham in Genesis 22, which hits even closer to home.)

V. 21: *'Eredah-na' we-'er'eh*

The chief agent speaks, and in the first person announces an intent to descend into the valley to reach Sodom and Gomorrah. Actually, as we learn in the next verse, he is dispatching his two subordinates to do so, while he remains to converse with Abraham. In so doing, they become agents with respect to him, even while he himself remains an agent of their superordinate principal, God. (The hierarchy is nested.) Speaking now in his capacity as a principal, and given agency commonplace #1 (and more obliquely, #3 and #7), he is entitled to refer to his agents as if he were personally carrying out the task.[59]

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[59] A similar usage—in which a principal's "going down" actually refers to his dispatch of agents—may perhaps be attested in the depiction of messaging by the author of ostracon 3:14–18 found in Lachish (early 6th century BCE):

ירד שר הצבא כניהו בן אלנתן לבא מׁצרימה
ואת הודויהו בן אחיהו ואנשו שלח לקחת מׁזה

> "the commander of the army, Coniah the son of Elnathan, has gone down to enter Egypt—(it was) Hodaviah son of Ahijah and his agents (whom) he sent (there) to take (materiel) from here." (my transl.)

Similar syntax occurs in Jer 26:22. However, compare two published renderings:

> "the commander of the army, Coniah the son of Elnathan, has gone down to Egypt. And Hodaviah son of Ahijah and his men, he (i.e., Coniah) sent from here." (transl. Schniedewind)

> the commander of the army, Konyahu the son of Elnatan, has gone down in order to enter Egypt. He has sent (messengers) to take Hawdawyahu son of Ahiyahu and his men from there. (transl. Gogel)

These two translations differ greatly from each other; each one struggles to deal with a continuity problem that appears between the two clauses when they are read literally. However, such an anomaly is normally a telltale sign of metonymy—so I construe the passage accordingly, which resolves the continuity problem. Furthermore, it seems to me that my rendering best accounts for the fronted direct object in the second clause.

The published translations appear respectively in William M. Schniedewind, "Hebrew Inscriptions English Translation" module, version 3.1, Accordance Bible Software; Sandra Landis Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew*. SBL Resources for Biblical Study 23 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 416. I have adjusted the line breaks and punctuation in those renderings, for the sake of ready comparison with my own translation.

Ha-ke-ṣaʻqatah ha-ba'ah 'elai ("if it accords with the outcry that has reached Me")

This chief agent shifts into speaking in God's name *in the first person*. This figure of speech is conventional, for it is licensed by commonplace #8, since the principal's identity is already known to Abraham.

V. 22: We-'abraham 'odennu 'omed li-pney Yhwh

This reference to *Yhwh* should be construed as a metonym for the chief agent (see above at v. 20). It is unaffected by the famous rabbinic claim that Abraham was deemed so important that the text had originally stated that God was waiting for him, rather than the reverse (Midrash Genesis Rabbah 49.7 and Masoretic lists of *Ṭiqqunei Soperim*). I am among those who consider that claim to be a hyperbolic midrash that honors Abraham— and not a viable historical claim of scribal emendation.[60] At any rate, what is of interest is the text as it now reads.

V. 23: Ha-'af tispeh

Abraham addresses his interlocutor as if speaking with *Yhwh* directly. This manner of communicating is licensed by the conceptual metonymy that underlies agency; see commonplace #11.

V. 33: Wa-elekh Yhwh

The chief agent leaves promptly (v. 33), presumably in order to report back the findings to his principal (God)—for that is another commonplace with regard to messengers (albeit not yet listed in my tabulation). It is part of the messaging script. As Meier has noted, "the messenger as a fact-finder, inspector or investigator is a widely attested phenomenon" (*Messenger*, p. 232). But even a messenger who simply announces a message (e.g., a herald) was expected to return to the principal and confirm that the mission was accomplished: "the messenger's task was finished when the messenger had returned safely back to the point of despatch" (ibid., pp. 230–31).

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[60] See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), pp. 64–66; Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 37–40; Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, transl. and ed. E. J. Revell (Scholars Press/SBL, 1980), 49–51.

The fact that it is normal in the Bible for a messenger—whether sent by God or by a human principal—to vanish from the scene after the message is delivered can be explained as a matter of ellipsis, based on the messaging script.

Appendix 10: Implications for Some Other Passages Involving God's Messengers

I do not mean to suggest that God in the Bible is *always* depicted as operating via agents. Rather, I claim that whenever the deity is depicted as doing so, the ancient audience had a ready-made cognitive frame for construing those depictions. In the following analysis, I have not attempted to apply the commonplaces to every case where a biblical interpreter has claimed that there is "confusion" between God (as principal) and agent. There may well be some instances where commonplaces alone cannot account for all apparent anomalies. (Of course, the Bible includes narratives in which God is depicted as inter-acting with human beings directly—without intermediaries. I would not dispute that Exodus 24, for example, portrays a direct encounter with the deity, including a visual experience. Thus one has good reason to ask why in Genesis 12:7 and 17:1 God "appears" to Abram/Abraham without evident mediation, whereas in Genesis 18 it is only God's agents who "appear.") In many cases, the biblical text seems agnostic regarding *how* people manage to discern God's will. It is rarely the narrator's concern. However, in at least the following cases, participant references are indeed at issue in the depiction of God's communications with human beings—and in such cases, the human agency commonplaces seem to be in play.

Genesis 16:7–13 (Hagar at the Well)

• In verse 8, the narrator relates that Hagar is being addressed by a *mal'ak Yhwh* ("the LORD's messenger"), but how does she herself know this? Here is an instance of commonplace #5: when the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it goes without saying that the messenger expeditiously identifies the principal upon arrival. This explains why Hagar promptly admits the self-incriminating fact that she is a runaway slave (v. 8).

• In verse 10, this *mal'ak* speaks for God quite conventionally via the first person. See commonplace #8.

• In verse 13, following the exchange between Hagar and the angel, the narrator refers to *Yhwh ha-dober 'eleha* ("the LORD who spoke to her," NJPS). This is an instance of commonplace #1: a narrator may refer to an agent's action as if it were the principal's action (e.g., using the principal's name to refer to the agent). This metonym under-scores that the angel was indeed speaking on God's behalf, as he made his fateful pronouncements.

- Also in verse 13, Hagar, after having encountered one of God's agents, names the site El-roi, on account of its being where El (God) *ro'i*, "recognized me [as His agent]."[61] (The precise force of her remark is obscure, so scholars often emend the text; but this main point is clear enough.) This is likewise an instance of commonplace #1: a speaker may refer to an agent's action as if it were the principal's action; here, Hagar uses the principal's epithet El to refer to the messenger. Her metonym expresses her confidence that her interlocutor had been acting upon God's instructions. She believes the message and proceeds to act accordingly.

Genesis 19:12–13, 24–25, 29 (Sodom)

- In verses 12–13, the *'anašim* ("agents"; also designated as *mal'akim* in vv. 1 and 15) disclose to Lot that "we are about to destroy this place. . . . The LORD has sent us to destroy it." Yet in verses 24–25, the narrator states that *Yhwh* provided the heavenly fire that destroyed the city. The ancient audience would have construed the latter usage as a conventional metonymy, per commonplace #6.

- In the 12th century, the commentator Radak (Rabbi David Kimḥi) couched the metonymy as *ha-mal'ak niqra' be-šem 'adonayw* ("the messenger is called by the name of his master"), which he adduced at verse 24.

- In verse 29, the narrator's summary of the episode states that *'elohim* destroyed the cities. This usage would have been construed as referring to the agents via a metonym, per commonplace #1 (see also below, s.v. Gen 32).

Genesis 21:17–18 (Hagar in the wilderness of Beer-sheba)

- In verse 17, the narrator relates that Hagar is being addressed by a *mal'ak 'elohim* ("God's messenger"), but how does she herself know this? Here is an instance of commonplace #5: when the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it goes without saying that the messenger expeditiously identifies the principal upon arrival.

- In verse 18, this *mal'ak* speaks for God quite conventionally via the first person. See commonplace #8.

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[61] This construal of the verb is activated by Hagar's task assignment, as conveyed by the angel: go back home and bear this child. That agency context evokes the sense of *ra'ah* as "to recognize someone as one's agent." See Gen. 41:33; Deut. 12:13; 33:21; Judg. 16:1; 1 Sam. 14:52; 16:1; 16:17; 2 Kgs. 10:3; Est. 2:9; 1 Chron. 17:17; cf. Gen 22:8 (ram for sacrifice).

Genesis 22:11–14 (Abraham on Mount Moriah)

- In verse 11, the narrator relates that Abraham is being addressed by a *mal'ak Yhwh* ("the LORD's messenger"), but how does he himself know this? Here is an instance of commonplace #5: when the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it goes without saying that the messenger expeditiously identifies the principal upon arrival. This explains Abraham's immediate willingness to obey (ibid.).

- In verse 12, this *mal'ak* speaks for God quite conventionally via the first person. See commonplace #8.

- In verse 14, after he has sacrificed a ram instead of his son, Abraham names the site *Yhwh yir'eh* ("the LORD identifies"; for *ra'ah* in this sense of "identify [an agent]," see Gen 41:33; Deut 12:13; 33:21; Judg 16:1; 1 Sam 14:52; 16:1, 17; 2 Kgs 10:3; Est 2:9; 1 Chr 17:17). This name refers back to his own statement to his son in verse 8, where it applied to the choice of a sacrificial animal as an intermediary; but now it is also re-applied to God's implicit choice of this site as an ongoing mediating place (the site of the future Temple in Jerusalem).

- Also in verse 14, the narrator invokes a saying, *b'har Yhwh yeira'eh* ("On the LORD's Mount, He makes contact" or more literally: ". . . He is made apparent"). The saying is thus cast as metonymic: the angel who had contacted Abraham (v. 11) is referenced inflectionally as the principal who presumably had dispatched him. This is an instance of commonplace #1: a narrator may refer to an agent's action as if it were the principal's action. This usage underscores that just as God was made apparent to their ancestor Abraham via a timely messenger, so, too, those who visit the Temple can expect a sense of contact with the divine.

Genesis 31:3, 11–13 (Jacob in Paddan-aram)

- In verse 3, the narrator relates *Wa-yo'mer Yhwh 'el ya'aqob* ("the LORD said to Jacob"). As becomes clear later in the passage (see below), this is an instance of commonplace #1: a narrator may refer to an agent's action as if it were the principal's action (e.g., using the principal's name to refer to the agent). So the comment by Radak ad loc. (see above, s.v. Gen 19): *ha-mal'ak niqra' be-šem 'adonayw* ("the messenger is called by the name of his master"). At this point, it goes without saying that a messenger is involved. This metonym underscores that the agent who is speaking is indeed doing so on God's behalf.

- In verse 11, the narrator relates that Jacob understood that he had been addressed (in his dream) by a *mal'ak 'elohim* ("God's messenger"), but how did he himself know this?

Here is an instance of commonplace #5: when the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it goes without saying that the messenger expeditiously identifies the principal upon arrival. This explains Jacob's immediate willingness to obey (ibid.).

- In verses 12–13, this *mal'ak* speaks for God quite conventionally via the first person. See commonplace #8.

Genesis 32:25–33 (Jacob at the Jabbok)

- The initial notice that Jacob was alone (v. 25a) is consistent with the idea that spiritual experience often comes on suddenly and unexpectedly.

- In verse 25b, Jacob's encounter with an *'iš* ("agent") is not a surprise to the audience, given his recent encounter with a host of divine *mal'akhim* ("messengers") nearby (32:2–3). That earlier co-text places *'iš* in the situational context (or cognitive frame) of agency, which evokes its sense here as "agent."

- If so, then here is an instance of commonplace #5: when the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it goes without saying that the messenger expeditiously identifies the principal upon arrival. This would explain why there is otherwise no clear statement that Jacob recognizes the identity of his adversary's principal; yet such recognition is clear by the story's end.[62]

- Before the agent's advent, Jacob was already in an extremely distracted and agitated state. Thus either he predictably resists receiving the agent's message, or the agent's mission involves doing whatever it takes to get Jacob's full attention and restore his presence of mind—or both. Hence the nighttime struggle.

- After his nighttime encounter with the agent, Jacob says: *ra'iti 'elohim panim 'el panim* ("I have seen [an] *'elohim* face-to-face"). The ancient audience would readily construe such usage as a figure of speech (conventional metonymy) that designates not God but the agent, per commonplace #1. Thereby, Jacob would be expressing his confidence that his interlocutor had been acting upon God's instructions. (A similar concern that seeing an angel is dangerous is articulated by Gideon in Jud 6:22 and by Manoah in Jud

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[62] Contrast the view that the lack of a report of the agent's self-disclosure and of Jacob's recognition of same is a matter of intentional, artful enigma on the part of the text's composer. See Stephen A. Geller, "The Struggle at the Jabbok: the Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative," *JANES* 14 (1982): 37–60; reprinted in his *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (Eisenbrauns, 1997).

13:21–22, which means that Jacob's expressed sense of risk does not in itself indicate that he was referring literally to his deity.)

- Similar reference to God's agents as *'elohim* are found in Gen 19 (see above, ad loc.); Exod 21:6; 22:7–8, 27; 32:1, 23; Jud 13:21–22; 1 Sam 28:13; Hosea 12:4–5. All of these can be explained as conventional metonymic usages, per commonplace #1. Alternatively, all such cases could be construed as instances of an extended lexical sense of *'elohim* as "intermediary"—a sense that was originally derived from a well-entrenched metonymy.[63]

Exod 3:7–12 (Who takes the Israelites out of Egypt?)

- At first, in Exod 3:7–9, *Yhwh* speaks in the first person of having "come down to rescue" (*wa-'ered le-haṣṣilo*) the suffering nation of Israel and bring them up out of Egypt (*le-haʿaloto*). But then immediately God assigns Moses as an agent (*leka we-ešlaḥaka*, v. 8)—and thus speaks of him as the one to actually carry it out (*we-hoṣei' 'et 'ammi . . . mi-miṣrayim*, "take my people out of Egypt," ibid.; *be-hoṣi'aka 'et haʿam*, v. 12).

- Thus even in the same utterance, it is possible to speak both of oneself and of one's agent(s) as carrying out the mission in question. This is consistent with agency commonplace #1 (see especially the discussion of Judg 8:19–20 in Appendix 5).

- Soon the narrator underscores that *Yhwh* had tasked Moses and Aaron with taking the Israelites out of Egypt: *wa-yṣawwem . . . le-hoṣi' 'et benei yisra'el* (Exod 6:13).

- Afterward, when God and Moses subsequently mention *only each other* as the party who took the Israelites out of Egypt, this is not a denial of their own involvement. Rather, in situations where Moses' *continued involvement as God's agent* is at stake, both God and the Israelites acknowledge him as the agent who had carried out this mission (Exod 32:1, 7, 23; 33:1; Deut 9:12). Usually, however, this feat is attributed to his principal, not only in God's self-reference (e.g., Exod 3:17; 20:2; 29:46; Num 15:41), but also by Moses (Exod 32:11; Deut 6:12; 9:26) and by other characters (e.g.,

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[63] On the lack of a sharp boundary between conventional metonyms and lexical meaning, see Kevin Chau's and Geoffrey Nunberg's observations cited in Appendix 3; cf. Stephen Shead's characterization of a similar figure of speech—"conventionalized metaphor"—as *directly retrieved* (along with its frame) from the mental lexicon" (*Radical Frame Semantics*, p. 64; emphasis in original).

1 Sam 12:6; 1 Kgs 8:51; Dan 9:15). These variant usages are likewise compatible with commonplace #1.

• Compare Num 20:16, where Moses explains to the king of Edom that *Yhwh* effected the liberation from Egypt via a *mal'akh* ("messenger"), a self-reference;[64] Josh 24:5–6, where Joshua quotes God as mentioning His having "sent" Moses (as an agent) as part of liberating the Israelites from Egypt; and 1 Sam 12:6, 8, where Samuel speaks in similar terms. In these summaries, both principal and agent receive respective credit.

Numbers 22:31–38; 23:26 (Balaam on the way to Balak)

• In verse 31, Balaam's act of bowing to the ground and his subsequent utterances together indicate that he recognizes who is the principal of a *mal'ak Yhwh* who has been blocking his path. For he proceeds to say to King Balak, "I can speak only the word that *'elohim* puts into my mouth" (v. 38); in 23:26, he reiterates his statement but uses the name *Yhwh* specifically. (See also commonplace #10; Balaam conditions his deferential gesture and manner of speaking upon the social rank of the principal—not that of the messenger.)

• How did Balaam know the principal's identity? Surely the messenger made this disclosure, which went without saying, per commonplace #5.

• In verse 34, when Balaam says *'im ra' be-'eineka* ("If you still disapprove"; NJPS), he is addressing the messenger as a stand-in for the principal (i.e., "If You still disapprove"), per commonplace #11.

• In verse 35, the *mal'ak* then speaks for God quite conventionally via the first person (*'ašer 'adabber 'eleka*, "[only] what I tell you to say," echoing what *'elohim* had said in v. 20), per commonplace #8: messengers may address the message's recipient as if the principal were speaking.

• In this passage, by the terms *'elohim* and *Yhwh*, Balaam and the narrator seem to reference the principal, rather than the agent (via conventional metonymy). The agent is involved only in the scene of obstruction depicted in verses 22–35.

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[64] Milgrom's interpretation (*JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers*, ad loc.)—namely, that *mal'akh* here refers to the angel(s) mentioned in several passage in Exodus—is less likely, because an angel is never credited with having "brought out" the Israelites from Egypt, whereas Moses is.

Joshua 5:13–6:5 (Joshua at Jericho)

• On Joshua's perception and his question upon encountering the figure designated as *iš*, see Appendix 8.

• In 5:14, a divine messenger self-identifies as God's military envoy (*śar ṣeba' Yhwh*; 5:14). He then prepares Joshua for a fateful message (v. 15) before instructing Joshua on military tactics (6:2–5), which this particular agent is uniquely qualified to explain.

• In 6:2, just as this divine messenger is about to disclose a highly unusual procedure for the capture of Jericho, the narrator applies a timely conventional metonym, referring to him as "the LORD," per commonplace #6.[65] This usage underscores that the agent continues to speak for his principal.

Judges 2:1–4 (Announcement at Bochim)

• In verses 1 and 4, the narrator relates that *kol benei yisra'el* ("all the Israelites") were addressed by a *mal'ak Yhwh* ("the LORD's messenger"), but how how did the Israelites themselves know this? Here is an instance of commonplace #5: when the text's audience already knows the sender's identity, it goes without saying that the messenger expeditiously identifies the principal upon arrival. This explains why the Israelites broke into weeping upon hearing the harsh message (v. 4).

• In verses 1–4, this *mal'ak* then speaks for God quite conventionally via the first person. See commonplace #8.

Judges 6:1–24 (Gideon's appointment)

• It goes without saying that Gideon's visitor does announce himself as a *mal'ak Yhwh* upon arrival, per commonplace #5. Indeed, the agent presents a charge to Gideon that makes no sense unless the principal's identity is known. Gideon does not dismiss that charge out of hand nor tell the messenger that he's "talking crazy," which confirms that

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[65] The change in the designation of speaker in Jos. 6:2 (from the "*sar ṣeba' Yhwh*" to "*Yhwh*") is usually interpreted as marking the start of a new scene. Yet that reading leaves the previous scene without a proper ending (it would finish precipitously after the angel tells Joshua to remove his sandals, and Joshua does so). Joshua's expectation of a message (v. 14) would hardly be addressed. There would be no narrative resolution to the episode. There is no discourse marker to signal its conclusion. Furthermore, comparison with the similar episode of Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3) suggests that an important message is about to be conveyed, which also argues against the scene's ending with chapter 5. Rather, the circumstantial clause (beginning with conjunctive *waw*) in 6:1 links the preceding passage with the following one.

the latter has indeed already disclosed his principal. But Gideon is too alienated to fully believe the visitor's claim and therefore to immediately accept his commission; it is only upon the visitor's sudden disappearance (vv. 21–22) that the angel's identity as such really sinks in to his awareness. Sometimes we human beings recognize spiritual experiences only in retrospect, and only after being startled.[66]

• Although Gideon's interlocutor is first designated as a *mal'ak Yhwh* (vv. 11, 12), with each of the agent's fateful pronouncements (vv. 14, 16, 23), the narrator designates him instead as *Yhwh*. This is conventional metonymy, per commonplace #6. So also Radak (see above, s.v. Gen 19), who characterized the usage here as *ha-mal'ak niqra' be-šem 'adonayw* ("the messenger is called by the name of his master"). It underscores that the messenger continues to speak on the principal's behalf.

Judges 13:2–23 (Manoah's Wife)

• It goes without saying that a *mal'ak Yhwh* who visits Manoah's wife immediately identifies himself as *Yhwh*'s agent, per commonplace #5; this is also evident from the fact that she then describes him fairly accurately to her husband as "God's agent (*'iš 'elohim*)" and not as just some crazy stranger (v. 6). (That by *'elohim* she indeed means *Yhwh* and not some other deity is confirmed by her husband's proceeding to pray specifically to *Yhwh* [v. 8], and by her own words at the story's end [v. 23].) Even though he looks like a *divine* agent—by her own admission—she cannot quite believe it, so she takes him for a *human* agent. In other words, she does not recognize what is right in front of her and has been disclosed to her. This evinces her spiritual alienation.

Isaiah 7 (Isaiah and King Ahaz)

• In verse 3, *Yhwh* directs the prophet Isaiah to deliver a message to King Ahaz of Judah. The content of the initial message is spelled out in verses 4–9.

• An application of commonplace #6 appears in verse 10, where the narrator designates Isaiah—a *human* agent of God—as *Yhwh*. That metonym signals that this agent continues to serve as God's representative as he confronts the king. (The arc of the participant references in vv. 3, 7, and 13 implies that Isaiah is likewise the referent in this verse, despite the change in designation.)

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[66] Contrast Kugel, pp. 19–20; see above, nn. 26 and 35. The Bible repeatedly depicts the human tendency to need some kind of wondrous proof before undertaking God's charge—whether it was presented by an agent or by God directly. This case is no exception. Gideon's reluctance is therefore not a sign that he is clueless as to the divine source of the call.

- Metonymy is likewise used to designate God's human oracles when they speak in God's name—see Gen 25:22–23; Judg 20:27–28; 1 Sam 23:9–12.

Zechariah 1:13; 3:2

- In Zechariah's self-narrated visions, he encounters various divine agents of God, whom at certain points he designates as *Yhwh*, per commonplace #6:

- In 1:13, that designation seems to be applied to the character previously designated both as *'iš* ("an agent"; vv. 8, 10) and as *mal'ak Yhwh* ("*Yhwh*'s messenger"; v. 11). This figure, who is engaged in God's service while poised on a horse "among the myrtles," has already participated in a three-way conversation with the prophet (v. 11). The conventional metonymy comes at a key juncture in the conversation—regarding God's attitude toward "Jerusalem and the towns of Judah." It underscores that the agent continues to speak for the principal as he starts to describe a fateful shift in that attitude.

- In chapter 3, the only speaker is a *mal'ak Yhwh* (introduced in v. 1), whom the narrator designates in verse 2 as *Yhwh*. This is an instance of a conventional metonym, which is invoked at a key juncture—namely, as the angel confronts the Accuser, who apparently has prevailed until this moment. (This construal of the designation explains the third-person references to *Yhwh* as this figure speaks.) It underscores that the agent speaks for the principal while defending the high priest Joshua.

- Radak (see above, s.v. Gen 19) characterized the usage in 3:2 as *ha-mal'ak niqra' be-šem 'adonayw* ("the messenger is called by the name of his master"; ad loc.).

Appendix 11: Some Scholarly Views on God's Use of Agents in Genesis 18 and Beyond

Here is a synopsis of selected scholars' views on God's use of agents—particularly angels—in chronological order. (Everyone agrees that in Genesis 18 at least two agents of God are involved; and further, that Abraham recognizes that his visitors represent some kind of contact with the divine at least by 18:23, when he begins the famous dialogue about the fate of Sodom. But scholars differ as to the identity of the third *'iš*, and as to when and how Abraham understands that his visitors are speaking for his deity.) *None of these authors considered that metonymy and ellipsis might be at work in the biblical passages under study.* Unless otherwise noted, they also did not reference the attested commonplaces of divine and human *mal'akim* (see Appendixes 4 and 5).

Ephraim A. Speiser (*Genesis* [Anchor Bible] [Doubleday, 1962]) at chapter 18 concluded that angels are depicted in a manner quite unlike human messengers: "In association with a divine term, the noun [*mal'ak*] refers to a manifestation of the Deity, but not necessarily a separate being. In the present chapter, for instance, the angel is later identified with Yahweh himself (v. 13). For one reason or another, an angel is interposed, in human form as a rule, to avoid direct contact between Yahweh and mortals."

Nahum Sarna (*The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* [1989]) concluded that the "revelation" mentioned in Gen 18:1 consists of the three *'anašim* who were divine emissaries. Even so, he devoted an excursus to dealing with the observation that "the demarcation between God and His angel is often blurred." He posited various theological explanations for this.

Carol Newsom ("Angels [Old Testament]," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [1992]: I, 248–53) discussed the relationship between agent and principal, noting: "In many of the narratives the *mal'ak* initially appears to be a distinct figure. But at some point in the account it appears as though Yahweh were personally present instead of the *mal'ak Yhwh*." She asserted that the "most likely explanation" is "the expression of a tension or paradox: Yahweh's authority and presence in these encounters is to be affirmed, but yet it is not possible for human beings to have an unmediated encounter with God."

Edward Greenstein ("The God of Israel and the Gods of Canaan: How Different Were They?" Ron Margolin, ed., *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division A [1997], pp. 47*–58*) wrote: "Although most exegetes . . . shy away from acknowledging that the Lord himself is one of Abraham's three visitors, only such a reading accounts for the repeated sudden addresses of God to Abraham (e.g., vv. 13, 17, 20) and the fact that without assuming that the Lord is a member of the trio, the third

visitor disappears without a trace. . . . Assume that God is one of the three, and there are no gaping holes in the plot and the verses make sense in their present sequence" (p. 57*).

Frank H. Polak ("The Messenger of God and the Dialectic of Revelation," in *A Light for Jacob: Studies in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls in Memory of Jacob Shalom Licht*, ed. Y. Hoffman and F. Polak [Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1997], pp. 14*–30*) addressed the question of why both the deity and angels are repeatedly depicted as present and speaking to the same person in the same scene. He explained this phenomenon *functionally* as two symbiotic representations: "the physical appearance of the messenger increases the concrete power of the revelation," while God's speech preserves the "divine authority of the message" (p. 15*). He rejected the standard view of "blurred identities" in favor of this "double representation" (p. 16*).[67]

Samuel Meier ("Angel I," *DDD*, 2nd edn. [1998], pp. 44–50; "Angel of Yahweh," pp. 53–59) is one of the few modern or contemporary scholars who has interpreted descriptions of divine agency in terms of the conventions in human society—and in so doing he helpfully explained some ostensible anomalies regarding angels (pp. 47–48). At the same time, Meier denied commonplaces #5 and #8; after noting that human messengers "do speak in the first person as if they were the sender of the message," he claimed (incorrectly, due to selection bias) that "such speech, in unequivocal messenger contexts, is always preceded by a prefatory comment along the lines of 'PN [the sender] said to you' after which the message is provided" (p. 49). He also explicitly denied the existence of commonplace #6 (ibid.). Hence, he was left to conclude that "the angel of YHWH in these perplexing biblical narratives does not behave like any other messenger known in the divine or human realm" of the ancient Near East (ibid.). He therefore favored the interpolation theory—that is, that the word *mal'ak* was inserted in some cases to avoid "theological discomfort" (p. 58).

Jack R. Lundbom ("Parataxis, Rhetorical Structure, and the Dialogue over Sodom in Genesis 18," in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, ed. Philip Davies and David J. A. Clines. JSOT Suppl. Series 257 [1998], pp. 136–45) came close to recognizing the metonymic usage in Genesis 18's narrated references to agents. He attempted a literary solution. He observed that as the result of what he saw as the story's odd "shifts" of participant reference, "more background is created." That is, he

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[67] In my view, Polak's solution is not convincing, for it begs the question of why a disembodied voice is any better proof as to the message's divine authority than is witnessing a marvel at the hands of an angel. On what basis would the recipient who doubted (or did not realize) that the angel came from God then decide that such a voice truly comes from God?

viewed the apparent narrative gaps as simply part of the Bible's generally laconic writing style—which is, as Erich Auerbach famously put it, "mysterious and 'fraught with background'" (*Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, transl. Willard R. Trask [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953], p. 12). What I attribute to linguistic economy (due to a perceived reliance on commonplaces), Lundbom labeled "parataxis." He concluded that in Gen 18:13, "the messenger is still present even though he is designated as 'Yahweh'"; thus, "in a more modern construction, the text would read: 'Yahweh, speaking through the messenger, said. . . .'"[68]

Lénart de Regt (*Participants in Old Testament Texts and the Translator: Rhetorical Devices and Their Rhetorical Impact* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999]) construed Genesis 18 in rhetorical terms. For example, he observed that the designation "the Lord" is first applied to a particular character in verse 13—when the speaker is "about to say something important and unexpected" (p. 76). When interpreting the story overall, given that the narrator designates one of the 'three men' as *Yhwh* (vv. 1, 13, etc.), de Regt construed those terms literally and thus concluded that Abraham's visitors consisted of "the Lord and his two companions" (p. 45). Meanwhile, given the absence of stated identification, Abraham does not realize until at least verse 10 whom he is hosting. On that basis, De Regt observed that "full reference to the Lord as a participant is withheld until vv. 13–14" (p. 76), making Genesis 18 a prime case of "initial underspecification" of a major participant. The Bible's reason for doing so was "in order to arouse interest . . . and achieve suspense" (p. 77).[69]

Edgar W. Conrad ("Messengers in Isaiah and the Twelve: Implications for Reading Prophetic Books," *JSOT* 91 [2000]: 83–97) noted linguistic usages in biblical *poetry* that are similar to the *prose* commonplaces discussed in this paper; he interpreted them in theological terms, as representing an intentionally "blurred demarcation between the human and the divine" (p. 87).

James Kugel (*The God of Old* [NY: The Free Press, 2003]) concluded that "apparently, everyone [in the biblical world] knows what an encounter with an angel is like and, at least after the angel's identity is revealed, know how to behave in such a situation. . . . they know, in other words, that the spiritual realm is always there, ready to intrude on the physical" (pp. 15, 24). That assessment applies better to my interpretation of Genesis 18 than to Kugel's own—which is that Abraham's visitors go unrecognized;

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[68] In the latter respect, Lundbom's conclusions align with my own.

[69] Metonymy was nowhere considered in de Regt's book-length study of "reference devices."

he asserted that Abraham and Sarah are in "some sort of fog" throughout the meal (pp. 10–13). After observing that "for many of these biblical narratives, the 'angel' never really ceases being God" (p. 32) and that "the human form in one text turns out to be God in another" (p. 33), Kugel concluded that "the angel in all of these texts . . . is not so much an emissary, or messenger, of God as God Himself in human form." After all, he reasoned (without accounting for synonyms such as *'iš*), "if an angel were . . . a real *messenger* of God, then every angel would no doubt be called an angel consistently" (p. 34).[70]

Michael Fishbane (*Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* [NY: Oxford University Press, 2003], pp. 72–74), in his discussion of the Bible's "delegated agents of the divine will to human beings on earth" (p. 72), gave "a close and unapologetic attention to the narrative in Genesis 18–19" (p. 73). After noting that the narrator designates one of the 'three men' as *Yhwh* (vv. 13, 17, 20, etc.), Fishbane construed those terms literally and thus concluded: "One can hardly doubt that these narratives preserve a precious record of the ancient belief in divine agency, whereby YHWH and His messengers could materialize in human form upon earth in order to perform certain tasks" (p. 74).

George W. Savran (*Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative* [NY: T & T Clark, 2005]) examined the biblical texts that depict "actual meeting between human and divine" (p. 1) and how the human participants were affected by those visitations. With regard to Genesis 18, he concluded that "Abraham remains unaware of the nature of his guests" until after the meal (p. 47), on the grounds that "if recognition were present in v. 1 it would be hard to explain Abraham's subsequent reactions to his guests" (p. 79). In other words, the patriarch's recognition comes quite gradually. Savran classed the episode as a theophany on the basis of the designation *Yhwh* (construed literally) in verses 1 and 13 (pp. 47, 79).

In the *New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), Maxwell John Davidson contended: "Some narratives show apparent merging of the angel and Yahweh, contrary to the normally clear distinction between messengers and those sending them" ("Angel," 1:148–50; here 150). In the same dictionary, Carol Stuart Grizzard observed that human messengers speak as if the principal were there,

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[70] Ironically, if Kugel had recognized the use of metonymy in the angels' designations, and had he imagined that the ancient audience would have expected the Bible to couch its depictions of spiritual experience in terms of the norms for intrahuman messengers, it would have strengthened his book's argument for its main thesis.

before noting that "God's messengers speak similarly on God's behalf" ("Messengers," 4:58–59; here 58).

Mart-Jan Paul ("The Identity of the Angel of the Lord," *Hiphil* 4 (2007): 1–12), strove to understand why in some cases "the messenger seems to appear as God himself." He then noted that "a messenger in the Ancient Near East is treated as his principal would have been treated" (p. 7); he cited the practice of bowing before a messenger according to the principal's status, and the practice of insulting a principal via insulting the messenger. But then he turned to investigate "how it is possible than an appearance of an angel could be interpreted as an appearance by God himself" (p. 8). A review of relevant passages prompted him to observe that somehow "the principal is present in the delegate" (p. 9). He concluded that "most likely" the divine messenger was viewed as "a representation of the Sender" (p. 10), before backing away from an answer: "Maybe, the question about the identity of the *mal'ak Yhwh* is a question unknown to the Scriptures. The emphasis is not on the messenger, but on the message of the divine Sender" (p. 11).

Esther Hamori (*When Gods Were Men*: *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* [BZAW 384; NY: Walter de Gruyter, 2008]) argued that one of Abraham's visitors and also Jacob's wrestling partner (Gen 32) were in fact theophanies "in fully human form." She identified those characters as God because in the first story the narrator says that *Yhwh* is speaking, and in the second story Jacob claims to have seen *'elohim*; she identified them as having "fully human form" because they eat and wrestle, and because their interlocutors do not seem to construe them otherwise. (However, according to Hamori's own findings, the posited motif is unattested anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible or ancient Near East. She did not recognize that this leaves no warrant for imagining that the ancient audience would construe the *'anašim* in these stories as God appearing in human form, as the text's plain sense. See further my review in the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 [2009].)

Benjamin Sommer (*The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* [NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010) construed designations in the narratives about God's agents literally, and then he interpreted them theologically. He cited Genesis 18–19 and the cases of a *mal'ak Yhwh* as the strongest examples of the "fluidity of divine selfhood in ancient Israel" (p. 40). This is because "the *mal'ak* in these cases is not a being separate from Yhwh whom Yhwh sent on a mission; rather, it is a part of the deity that can act on its own. Alternatively, it is possible that Yhwh temporarily overlaps with some heavenly beings who do God's bidding" (ibid.). Regarding Gen 18:1–2, "the juxtaposition of these two sentences . . . implies that Yhwh appears in the form of three men, or at least in the form of one of the three men" (ibid.). He concluded: "It is clear that

Yhwh appears in bodily form to Abraham in this passage" (ibid.) and yet at the same time, "this visitor . . . is Yhwh, but is not all of Yhwh or the only manifestation of Yhwh; rather, he is an avatar" (p. 41).

Nissim Amzallag ("The Identity of the Emissary of YHWH," *SJOT* 26/1 [2012]: 123–44) contended—as have some other scholars before him—that the term *mal'ak Yhwh* refers to a unique, specific independent persona. There is only one *mal'ak Yhwh*, who appears throughout the Bible. He also argued that "the identity of the emissary of YHWH may be determined through his affinities with other divine beings [elsewhere in the ancient world]" (p. 125), specifically smith-gods (p. 137).[71] Paradoxically, Amzallag asserted this being's independence on the grounds of "the frequent interchangeability between YHWH and his emissary" (p. 123, n. 1). He cited Gen 18–19 as a prime example of "confusion" between God and messenger. He asserted that the "fundamental differ-ence" between YHWH and an emissary is that only the latter can encounter mortals and may have a human appearance (p. 125). Consequently, it was the *mal'ak Yhwh*—rather than God—who visited Abraham in Genesis 18 (pp. 124, 126, 143). Thus the name YHWH actually refers to the divine emissary in 18:1, 13, 26, and 33 (p. 124). At the same time, Amzallag also characterized that emissary as "totally assimilated to YHWH" in v. 22 (pp. 126–27, n. 15). He concluded that "the confusion constantly promoted in the Bible between YHWH and his emissary" has arisen from the composers' theological concerns, which led to a conscious "effort to prevent his [i.e., the emissary's] worship by minimizing as much as possible his intervention" (p. 137).

Mark S. Smith ("The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134/3 [2015]: 471–88) builds upon the work of Hamori, Sommer, and others in order to trace and explain the development of Israelite conceptions of God's bodies. In this article's discussion of Gen 18, it held that "in v. 2, YHWH is one of the 'three men standing near' Abraham," and that "YHWH converses twice with Abraham" (pp. 474, 475). In other words, Smith construed the participant references literally. He

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[71] Amzallag undermined this aspect of his argument by showing that the audience had no *a priori* reason to construe the emissary in terms of other nations' deities. Ultimately, his main contention—that the term *mal'ak Yhwh* refers to the same, unique individual throughout the Bible—does not stand in the face of the actual usage found in numerous passages. For example, when *mal'ak Yhwh* is used to designate the character who appears to Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:7, we are told that it was the same *mal'ak* who had appeared in verse 5—but in that first instance, the term was used in specific yet indefinite reference. Thus the lack of determination fits "an angel" but not "the Angel." See also 2 Samuel 24; Zechariah 1–6; 1 Chr 21.

interpreted them theologically, by positing that "God's body as a human experience was seen to have occurred in the distant past and with the famous figures of the past" (p. 478).

    Michael B. Hundley ("Of God and Angels: Divine Messengers in Genesis and Exodus in Their Ancient Near Eastern Contexts," *Journal of Theological Studies* [forthcoming in 2016; manuscript available via academia.edu]) observed that as depicted in the Bible's first two books, "the text presents a . . . complicated portrait that seems to blur the boundaries between God and messenger, by rarely using messenger formulas and occasionally appearing to equate the messenger and its master." Furthermore, "even in the situations where messengers are distinct, they are not fully independent. They have no names or identities apart from being YHWH's subordinate messengers, who simply act as extensions of his person." (He did not notice that all of these statements are likewise true of messengers who are depicted in the human domain, apparently because his point of comparison was the messenger-deities known elsewhere in the Ancient Near East.) Hundley therefore attempted various theological solutions, none of which he deemed to be fully satisfactory. What I view as a narrative conciseness that is made possible by commonplaces, Hundley ultimately construed as intentional mystification: "Why then do the texts present such a complicated picture? It seems that their goal is not to provide clarity, but rather to leave the relationship between deity and messenger murky and variable. Such opacity serves their distinct theological agenda."

Appendix 12: Translating Metonymy via Verb Choice

The NJPS translation resorted to this tactic on occasion, in at least fifteen instances:

Passage	Principal	Hebrew	Literal rendering	NJPS
Gen 18:8	Abraham	*ben ha-baqar ʾašer ʿaśah*	the calf he had prepared	the calf that had been prepared
Gen 20:2	King Abimelech	*wa-yiqqaḥ ʾet śarah*	took Sarah	had Sarah brought to him
Gen 27:15	Rebekah	*wa-talbeš ʾet yaʿaqob*	dressed Jacob [in Esau's clothes]	had … Jacob put them on
Gen 42:24	Joseph	*wa-yeʾesor ʾoto*	bound him	had him bound
Gen 46:29	Joseph	*wa-yeʾsor … merkabto*	hitched his chariot	ordered his chariot
Exod 14:6	Pharaoh	*wa-yeʾsor ʾet rikbo*	hitched his chariot	ordered his chariot
Judg 3:27	Ehud	*wa-yitqaʿ ba-šofar be-har ʾepraim*	sounded the horn in the hill of Ephraim	had the horn sounded through the hill country of Ephraim
Judg 16:19	Delilah	*wa-tegallaḥ ʾet ševaʿ maḥlepot roʾšo*	cut off the seven locks of his head	had him cut off the seven locks of his head
1 Sam 13:3	King Saul	*taqaʿ ba-šopar*	sounded the ram's horn	had the ram's horn sounded
1 Sam 17:31	King Saul	*wa-yiqqaḥeihu*	took him	had him brought over
2 Sam 12:9	King David	*we-ʾoto haragta*	killed him	had him killed
1 Kgs 7:46	King Solomon	*yeṣaqam … be-maʿaveh*	cast them … in molds	had them cast in … molds
2 Kgs 4:24	wealthy woman	*wa-taḥaboš ha-ʾaton*	saddled the ass	had the ass saddled
Jer 52:27	king of Babylon	*wa-yakkeh ʾotam*	struck them down	had them struck down
Est 8:10	Mordecai	*wa-yiktov … wa-yaḥtom*	wrote and sealed them	had them written … and sealed

This practice suggests that likewise the messaging metonyms could be expressed lexically, via a verb that telescopes the messaging process. Thus the end of Hagar's encounter with God's agent in Gen 16:13 might read:

And she called the LORD who **directed** her, "You are El-roi"…

versus interpolation:

And she called the LORD who spoke to her **[via the messenger]**, "You are El-roi"…

versus the relatively literal NJPS rendering:

And she called the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El-roi"…

(For the *qal* participle *dober* as "to direct [or: instruct]," see Exod 6:29; Num 32:27; Jer 38:20; Jon 3:2; Zech 1:14.)

In English, certain verbs lend themselves to a metonymic construal of their subjects, whereas other verbs do not. To revert to my earlier hypothetical example about my receiving a message from the Queen, I could sum up that event by saying that "The Queen's messenger *appeared*," but I could not properly say "*The Queen *appeared*." For a messenger cannot represent the principal with regard to an "appearance." In contrast, I could say equally well either "I *was contacted by* the Queen's messenger" or "I *was contacted by* the Queen." Consider the acceptability for metonymic transfer of the following verbs:

YES	NO
contacted	appeared to
announced	spoke
reached out to	showed up for
investigated	went down to see

The former verbs seem to be less embodied than the latter. To further explore the contrast, consider our sportswriting extract (Appendix 3) and look at the respective verbs:

> Angels manager Mike Scioscia **pulled** starting pitcher Andrew Heaney after six scoreless innings. . . . The Angels **are closely monitoring** Heaney's workload.

Instead of "closely monitoring," we could easily substitute "closely observing"—but maybe not "closely watching" or "keeping a close eye on." And would a converse formulation lead to an equally acceptable metonym? (I think not.)

> *Angels manager Mike Scioscia **is closely monitoring** the workload of starting pitcher Andrew Heaney. The Angels **pulled** Heaney after six scoreless innings. . . .

How does the translation of Hebrew metonyms prompt a tinkering with English verbs? This can perhaps be explained by recourse to the cross-linguistic explorations of verbs of motion by Leonard Talmy, Dan Slobin, and other cognitive linguists (summarized in Ungerer and Schmid, pp. 230–42). In a "motion event," MANNER is one of the conceptual components. I submit that *messaging* can be considered to be a motion event. A PRINCIPAL-FOR-AGENT metonymy can be said to integrate the aspect of MANNER into the syntactic subject. Now, Talmy has classified Hebrew as a *verb-framed language* and English as a *satellite-framed language*. By this distinction he means that the two languages use differing strategies for expressing the MANNER in which a motion event is carried out: Hebrew normally expresses MANNER via an adverbial phrase or clause, whereas English expresses it via *a more precise choice of the verb itself*. To which I would add: a Hebrew metonym, because it incorporates MANNER, would likewise be best represented by a judicious English verb choice. This would explain the ability of certain English verbs to convey much of a Hebrew metonym's expressive potential.

Appendix 13: Lexical Translation Challenges

Another translation challenge is *lexical*, in that English does not have a word whose semantic potential corresponds exactly to at least two of the Hebrew terms often used for God's agents, namely *mal'ak* and *'iš*.

How many instances are at stake? In *TDOT*, Freedman-Willoughby asserts that there are 120 occurrences of *mal'ak* "as an envoy of God" (p. 315). I would guess that there are a couple of dozen occurrences of *'iš* as an agent of God, not counting 76 instances of the term *'iš 'elohim*. There are many borderline cases, since sometimes a character is an agent of both God and a human principal.

We usually gloss the word *mal'ak* with the English word "messenger," but their roles are not precisely the same. The tasks of arresting a suspect (as in 1 Sam 19:14) or assassinating a perceived traitor (2 Kgs 6:32) or gathering military intelligence (Josh 6:17, 25) are all performed by human *mal'akim*. Surely when the word *mal'ak* was then applied to *God's* agents (whether you consider this to be a literal or a metaphorical application), it was not a surprise to the ancient audience that such a figure could be violently destructive (Num 22:31; 2 Sam 2:16; 2 Kgs 19:35; 1 Chron. 21:12–16). However, most English speakers do not think of a "messenger" as wielding a sword—so rendering in such passages as "messenger" comes across as odd. This is an instance of a *lexical void*, which, as the Israeli linguist Menachem Dagut explained it, results from "different systems of reference employed by source language and target language." (Dagut, p. 89).

Similarly, although in their respective languages both *'iš* and "agent" are basic-level terms for a party who represents the interests of another party, the scope of application is different in specific situations. For example, while "agent" is commonly used to refer to ticket sellers, customer service reps, real estate brokers, representatives for artists and writers, and spies, it would sound odd in some of the settings where *'iš* appears, such as the battlefield.

Furthermore, unlike "agent" and "messenger" in English, both *'iš* and *mal'ak* can designate figures who act on another party's behalf without having been commissioned to do so (Exod. 2:16–20; 2 Sam 1:2; Job 1:13–15).

Furthermore, most English translations have obscured the "God operates via agents" motif by rendering *mal'ak* as "angel" when it refers to an agent of God. This practice goes all the way back to the Latin Vulgate, which greatly influenced the first English translations. (The earliest English version was made from the Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his followers in 1395. The distinction in rendering *mal'ak* appears there and

in the 16th-century Miles Coverdale, Bishop's, and Geneva Bibles, as well as in the King James Version.) For moderns, it might well be easier to picture an "angel" holding a sword than imagining a "messenger" doing so. However, such a rendering precludes readers' using the Bible's <u>human</u> *mal'akim* to construe how God operates via divine *mal'akim*; they miss that the same Hebrew word is used for both.

Partly for this reason, the CJPS translation replaced the NJPS "angel" throughout with "messenger." See *The Contemporary Torah* [2006], "Dictionary of Gender in the Torah," s.v. "Messenger." Similarly, Samuel A. Meier laments that the English rendering "angel" obscures "the ancient Israelite perception of the divine realm," but his objection is that the broader lexical scope of "angel" conflates all types of divine beings—not only the messengers; "Angel I," *DDD*, p. 47. Meanwhile, Mart-Jan Paul complains that rendering *mal'ak Yhwh* as "angel of the Lord" is tautological—who else's angel could it be?

Appendix 14: Our Emotional Investment in God's Presence in the Scenes of Genesis 18

I have seen signs of disappointment on peoples' faces when I have explained that God is not actually a party to the dialogues that are depicted in Genesis 18. It seems to me that many readers have an emotional investment in the conventional claims that God "person-ally" visited Abraham, who then showed gracious hospitality to his unidentified visitors to an extent that set him apart from others, and that he bravely proceeded to "argue" with God about the fate of Sodom. These are ancient interpretations with enduring popularity. So let me hasten to explain that I am not denying any of those "lessons" from the Bible. Rather, I am simply pointing out that those interpretations are midrashic, rather than the plain sense of the text.

There is no denying that the above midrashic lessons are powerful ones. Indeed, the most compelling midrash is fashioned precisely from hyperliteral readings that ignore associated commonplaces such as figures of speech! Such midrashic methods generate support from their very appeal to what is straightforwardly stated in the text. Consider another classic example—but one that is less dear to modern devotees of the Bible. In Exod 14:6 we read: *wa-ye'sor 'et-rikbo*, "He ordered his chariot" (NJPS); literally, "he hitched his chariot."[72] However, an ancient midrashic reading pointedly insists upon the literal meaning: "Pharaoh hitched it with his own hands" in order to pursue the Israelites, reflecting that there were no bounds to his lasting obsession with retaining control over them (*Mekilta de-Rabbi Yishma'el, Be-shallaḥ* 2). Since that hyperliteral reading is "right there" in the text, it can hardly be denied. This is what makes it so memorable.

Perhaps a time will come when students of the Bible may be more willing to accept that the plain sense of Genesis 18 is nonetheless remarkable in its own right. According to that depiction, Abraham was a patriarch who was privileged to receive three agents who had been dispatched to represent his deity; who took the opportunity to grandly display his deference to the divine will; and who respectfully sought clarification from an agent of the divine, with regard to the operation of divine justice, while resisting the temptation for self-dealing. For all of these acts, Abraham still stands out among the Bible's many figures. And meanwhile, the midrashic readings are no less valid as such.

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[72] On the plain sense, see the discussion in Appendix 5, s.v. commonplace #1.