

# God's n̄m (“comfort”) as the unfolding of God's promise in four Old Testament historical passages

**DL Beakley**  
**20302428**

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Promoter: Prof dr PP Krüger

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# Abbreviations

BAGD	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i>
BDB	<i>Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon</i>
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</i>
HALOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
MT	<i>The Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of the Old Testament and Exegesis</i>
SWANSON	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament) (electronic version from Logos Research Systems)</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
UT	<i>Ugaritic Textbook</i>

# Abbreviations of Books of the Bible

## *Old Testament*

Genesis	Ge
Exodus	Ex
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Nu
Deuteronomy	Dt
Joshua	Jos
Judges	Jdg
Ru	Ru
1 Samuel	1Sa
2 Samuel	2Sa
1 Kings	1Ki
2 Kings	2Ki
1 Chronicles	1Ch
2 Chronicles	2Ch
Ezra	Ezr
Nehemiah	Ne
Esther	Est
Job	Job
Psalms	Ps(s)
Proverbs	Pr
Ecclesiastes	Ecc
Song of Songs	SS
Isaiah	Isa
Jeremiah	Jer
Lamentations	La
Ezekiel	Eze
Daniel	Da
Hosea	Hos
Joel	Joel
Amos	Am
Obadiah	Ob
Jonah	Jon
Micah	Mic
Nahum	Na
Habakkuk	Hab

Zephaniah	Zep
Haggai	Hag
Zechariah	Zec
Malachi	Mal

## *New Testament*

Matthew	Mt
Mark	Mk
Luke	Lk
John	Jn
Acts	Ac
Romans	Ro
1 Corinthians	1Co
2 Corinthians	2Co
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Php
Colossians	Col
1 Thessalonians	1Th
2 Thessalonians	2Th
1 Timothy	1Ti
2 Timothy	2Ti
Titus	Tit
Philemon	Phm
Hebrews	Heb
James	Jas
1 Peter	1Pe
2 Peter	2Pe
1 John	1Jn
2 John	2Jn
3 John	3Jn
Jude	Jude
Revelation	Rev

# Abbreviations of Bible Versions<sup>1</sup>

American Standard Version	ASV	1901
Complete Jewish Bible	CJB	1998
Douay – Rheims American Bible	DRA	1899
English Revised Version	ERV	1885
English Standard Version	ESV	2001
Geneva Bible	GB	1599
Good News Bible	GNB	1976
Jewish Publication Society Bible	JPS	1917
King James Version	KJV	1611
Message	MSG	2001
New American Bible	NAB	1970
New American Standard Bible	NASB	1971
New English Bible	NEB	1961
New English Translation	NET	1995
New International Version	NIV	1984
New King James Version	NKJV	1982
New Living Translation	NLT	1996
New Jerusalem Bible	NJB	1985
New Revised Standard Version	NRSV	1989
Septuagint (Rahlfs)	LXX	1935
Revised Standard Version	RSV	1952
Tanakh (JPS)	TNK	1985
The Living Bible	TLB	1971
Webster Bible	WEB	1833
Young's Literal Translation	YLT	1898

Note: For this study, the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) is the base text for the Old Testament, and the UBS Greek New Testament 4<sup>th</sup> Edition is the base text for the New Testament. Thus, both base texts are not listed in the Bible translations.

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<sup>1</sup> A complete list of English translations listed in date order is found in Appendix A.

# Key Words

1. Repentance
2. Comfort
3. Compassion
4. Judgment
5. Grace
6. Redeemer
7. Impassibility
8. Open Theism
9. Anthropomorphism
10. Anthropopathism

# Summary

God expresses Himself with emotions. This is well attested in Scripture, with statements of love (1Jn 4:8), anger (Ex 4:14), and delight (Isa 62:4). But the real question is not whether God has emotions, but what is the source of those emotions. If God emotes in the context of our suffering, and our suffering is not abated, does this mean that God is impotent or indifferent? Both possibilities yield a frightening conclusion. Rightly understanding the character and nature of God in this regard is paramount.

For the past two thousand years, the prevailing doctrine was that God was in some way impassible, in that He is without passions or emotions with respect to his creation. This means that God does not change his feelings or thoughts about events on the earth. Even though certain passages called the “divine repentance” passages in the Old Testament (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; 1Sa 15:11, 35; Nu 23:19) appeared to contradict God’s impassibility, this was solved through the idea of anthropopathism, that is, the belief that God describes Himself with emotional terms.

Prior to 1930, most of the English Bible renderings of the divine repentance passages preferred the word “repent,” because the prevailing theology was rooted in the impassibility of God, and these passages were deemed to be anthropopathic. But with the doctrine of God’s impassibility now in question, English Bible translations began to reflect the view that God actually reacts to our suffering with strong emotion. Words such as “sorry,” “grief,” “regret,” and even “changed his mind” were now used to describe the reaction of God whenever God appeared to be disappointed with his creation, or worse, if He was disappointed with his own plan.

The purpose of this study is to provide an exegetical solution to the problem of God’s response in the divine repentance passages in four Old Testament historical texts. These passages are labelled as such because of the use of the Hebrew verb נחם which describe God as “sorry” or “repenting.” For those who hold to God’s full immutability, the preferred view through the ages was that the Hebrew נחם was to be taken as anthropopathically. This study will want to explore the possibilities of an alternative view for the Hebrew נחם in the divine repentance passages which allow for God’s passibility while holding to his full immutability. Specifically, this study not only strives to answer the question “Does God repent?”, but through a sound methodology

also wants to answer the larger question of the source of God's emotion when his judgment or grace is in view.

The methodology followed in this study is two-fold. First, it is biblical-theological, meaning that it utilises a whole-Bible theology, and following the work of Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton, posits that the Old Testament contains a theme or centre of grace within judgment. At the Fall in Ge 3, God simultaneously introduced judgment and grace into the world. That judgment and grace has never left. As one looks through the Bible, these are the two unbroken strands that weave their way through every chapter and every book.

In addition, this study is also an exegetical study, and follows the grammatical-historical-lexical-syntactical methodology of Walter Kaiser. God disclosed Himself objectively through the words of a book. This book records actual historical events, as well as specific declarations and commands from God Himself. It is necessary that the words of this book be correctly understood in their context so that a correct understanding of God will result.

Using this methodology, this study will explore the meaning of God's נחם in each divine repentance passage. The lexical study will be combined with the biblical-theological approach of a theme or centre of "grace within judgment" that flows through the Old Testament.

Because of this, is it possible that God, who is fully immutable, provide us everything that we need to navigate a world of sin, suffering and uncertainty? The answer could very well be in the understanding of God's נחם in light of our suffering and sin.

# Opsomming

God druk Homself emosioneel uit. Hierdie feit is duidelik waarneembaar uit die Skrif met stellings soos liefde (1Jn 4:8), woede (Eks 4:14) en vreugde (Jes 62:4). Die vraag is nie of God emosies het nie, maar wat die oorsprong van daardie emosies is. As God emosie moes toon in die konteks van ons swaarkry, terwyl ons swaarkry nie af neem nie, beteken dit dan dat God magteloos of ongevoelig is? Beide moontlikhede bied 'n skrikwekkende slotsom. Om die wese en karakter van God reg te verstaan, is van kardinale belang.

Vir bykans tweeduisend jaar is daar geglo dat God tot 'n mate emosioneel ontoeganklik en sonder gevoel (passie) is met betrekking tot sy skepping. Dit beteken dat God nie van gevoel of gedagte verander rondom gebeure op aarde nie. Sekere gedeeltes, naamlik die “goddelike berou” gedeeltes in die Ou Testament (Gen 6:6-7; Eks 32:12-14; 1Sam 15:11, 35; Num 23:19) dui oënskynlik daarop dat God wel meegevoel met sy skepping het. Hierdie gedeeltes is dan antropopaties verklaar, wat berus op die oortuiging dat God Homself by wyse van emosionele terme uitdruk.

Voor 1930 het die meeste Engelse Byblevertalings die “goddelike berou” gedeeltes vertaal met die woord “repent” (berou hê, bekeer). Hierdie vertaling het berus op die siening dat God ontoeganklik is. Hierdie gedeeltes is dan as antropopaties beskou. Toe die ontoeganklikheid van God egter bevraagteken is, het die Engelse Bybelvertalings begin om die begrip oor te dra dat God wel sterk emosioneel reageer op ons menslike lyding. Uitdrukkings soos “sorry” / “regret” (berou, jammer wees) “grief,” (bedroef wees) en selfs “changed his mind,” (van gedagte verander) is gebruik om God se reaksie van teleurstelling teenoor sy skepping, en selfs erger, om sy teleurstelling in sy eie plan aan te dui.

Die doel van hierdie studie is om 'n eksegetiese oplossing te bied op die probleem van God se reaksie in die “Goddelike berou” gedeeltes in historiese tekste van die Ou Testament. Hierdie Skrifdele word Goddelike berougedeeltes genoem weens die gebruik van die Hebreeuse werkwoord, **נחם**, wat God aandui as iemand wat berou het of Hom bekeer. Diegene wat God se onveranderlikheid handhaaf – die voorkeursiening deur die eeue – interpreteer die Hebreeuse begrip **נחם** antropopaties. Die onderhawige proefskrif wil 'n alternatiewe siening van die Hebreeuse begrip **נחם** in die “Goddelike berou” gedeeltes ondersoek, wat wat ruimte laat sowel vir God se

toeganklikheid as sy absolute onveranderlikheid. Meer bepaald: Hierdie proefskrif wil nie slegs 'n antwoord bied op die vraag of God berou het nie, maar wil met gebruikmaking van 'n goed verantwoorde metodiek ook die groter vraag na die oorsprong van God se emosie beantwoord, waar sy oordeel en genade binne die gesigsveld is.

Die metodiek wat gevolg word, is tweeledig. Eerstens, is dit Bybels-teologies in die sin dat dit 'n holistiese Bybelse benadering volg, na aanleiding van die werk van Walter Kaiser en James Hamilton, wat voorstel dat die Ou Testament 'n sentrale tema van genade-in-oordeel volg. Met die Sondeval in Gen 3 het God gelyktydig oordeel en genade aangekondig. Hierdie oordeel en genade het nog nooit van die menslike toneel verdwyn nie. Hierdie twee ononderbroke lyne is merkbaar in elke hoofstuk en elke boek die Bybel.

Die onderhawige proefskrif is tegelykertyd ook 'n eksegetiese studie, wat die grammaties-historiese-leksikale-sintaktiese metode van Walter Kaiser navolg. God het hom objektief deur minddel van woorde van 'n boek geopenbaar. Hierdie boek gee werklike historiese gebeure weer, sowel as bepaalde uitsprake en bevele wat van God kom. Dit is noodsaaklik dat die woorde van hierdie boek reg verstaan word in hulle konteks, sodat dit kan lei tot 'n juiste begrip van God.

Die onderhawige proefskrif gaan die betekenis van God se נחם in elk van die "Goddelike berou" gedeeltes na aan die hand van genoemde metodologie. Die leksikale studie word gekombineer met die Bybels - teologiese benadering, waar die sentrale tema van "genade binne oordeel" deur die Ou Testament nagegaan word.

In die lig hiervan moet die vraag gevra word of dit moontlik is dat God as die onveranderlike, ons ten volle kan toerus om ons pad te vind in 'n wêreld van sonde, lyding en onsekerheid. Die antwoord hierop is moontlik te vind in 'n deeglike begrip van God se נחם in die lig van lyding en sonde.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction and context

The identity, person, and personality of God lies at the core of any serious study of theology, yet after two millennia of Jewish and Christian theology, we are no closer to understanding the mystery of the person of God. It seems the more that we understand about God, the less as a percentage of the whole we know, so we are actually regressing in our discovery of the Creator. Many people who all claim the Bible as their source of spiritual authority maintain strong differences with each other in areas of hermeneutics and theology. These differences are not merely preferential, but rather originate from each person's view of the nature of the God of Scripture. As Terrence Fretheim (1984:1) says, "It is not enough to say that one believes in God. What is important finally is the *kind* of God in whom one believes."

One of the areas of strongest disagreement in Christian orthodoxy is in the realm of God's predetermined purposes and his response to man's choices. Debates have persisted through the ages over the sovereignty of God in his purposes and God's apparent response or change of purpose when confronted with people who sinned against God's purposes and decrees. If God is love, then how can He allow such rebellion in the creatures that He loves? Where does the compassion of God fit in the scheme of a sinful world? The idea of the justice of God dispensed against sinful people while simultaneously synthesized with his love for those same people seems paradoxical. These two antithetical attributes that are intertwined in their application to mankind raise critical questions about the nature and character of God.

What causes God to give love and not justice, or vice versa? Does God truly respond to man's actions? If so, then how does this correspond to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God? While these abstract questions create interesting discussions in seminary halls, academic institutions, and classrooms, the intimate knowledge of the person of God is critical to the person who is facing sickness, despair, rejection, financial ruin, and especially death. The question at hand is, "Can God actually "repent," "change his mind," or "regret" an action that He has previously decreed? If

God decreed justice, can He now change to love, and vice-versa? If so, then specifically what do we need to do to elicit such a change?

At the core of these ongoing questions about the nature and character of God is the discussion of the impassibility of God, a discussion which pits the attribute of God's transcendence over his immanence. Does God feel? Is He so outside and above his creation that He is uncaring? If this is so, then how can God love? How and why would He express wrath and anger? The main source of debate on these questions is found in the various biblical texts that speak to a critical pathos of God, which is repentance – the subject of this study.

The Old Testament portrays God as unchanging and unmoved in his ultimate purpose,<sup>2</sup> with clear passages like Nu 23:11, "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent," and Mal 3:6, "For I, the LORD, do not change." However, it also reveals a God who can be sorry, and He repents from his prior decisions. English versions vary in their descriptions of God being sorry for what He did (Ge 6:6-7, RSV), regretting choices that He made (1Sa 15:11, 35, NASB), and even changing his mind (Ex 32:14, NASB).<sup>3</sup> This apparent contradiction or paradox is confusing and perplexing to scholars and commentators.<sup>4</sup> Are the Scriptures now to be doubted, and if so, which ones? If not, do we worship a God who repents, feels sorry, or changes his mind? Is God not the "solid rock" that He claims to be (Ps 19:14)?

## **1.2 The need for the present study**

These questions about the person of God are very relevant to any man who is called to preach God's word from the pulpit. Graham Cole (2000:25) bridged the gap between the abstract and concrete when he said, "A sign of good theology is that it can be preached." The difficulty comes when preaching passages that appear to conflict with other passages and systematic theology in general. Specifically, the difficulty is with texts which show God expressing emotions described by repentance,

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<sup>2</sup> Some examples are God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be kept as slaves in Egypt for 400 years (Ge 15:13), the prophecy about Josiah in 1Ki 13, and Jeremiah's prophecy to the leaders in Jerusalem that they would be captives in Babylon for seventy years (Jer 25:11-14).

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English translations in the rest of the thesis will be from the NASB.

<sup>4</sup> While some English versions use less incriminating words like "relent," few commentators have been able to exegete these difficult passages that speak of repentance without first explaining that the immutable, sovereign, and omniscient God cannot repent as we know it (Parunak, 1973:1).

sorrow, or regret. The “repenting” of God in Old Testament Scripture has often been an embarrassment to Jewish and Christian interpreters because of the challenge and apparent conflict this poses with various attributes of God, such as immutability (Moberly, 1998:112). In view of this, when someone approaches these texts, how does he or she interpret them in light of God’s immutability and supposed impassibility?

The debate is critical, and not merely an academic exercise, as A.W. Tozer (1961:1) writes:

*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.... For this reason the gravest question before the church is God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time might say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.*

The twentieth century introduced a period of monumental change for society as a whole, and in particular has introduced a serious quest for spiritual answers and solutions to modern problems. Today’s current thinking among scholars and theologians now challenges previously established doctrines. Examples range from the view of various twentieth century scholars that hold that the church fathers were influenced by pagan Greek culture (Pollard, 1955:353), to the assertion that various movements such as feminism, liberation theology, understanding catastrophic events, and the final word of science all contribute to a metaphoric shift<sup>5</sup> in hermeneutics (Fretheim, 1984:14-16).

In particular, from the early part of the twentieth century, many scholars have rejected the idea of God’s impassibility<sup>6</sup> while still holding to his immutability.<sup>7</sup> The question of God’s passibility, however, has strong implications in English Bible translations.

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<sup>5</sup> Fretheim describes the shift as moving away from literal, grammatical, and historical principles, and moving to a more subjective and experiential approach.

<sup>6</sup> God’s impassibility means that God does not have passions or emotions (Grudem, 1994:165). God’s “passibility” would be the opposite of his “impassibility.”

<sup>7</sup> Sarot (1990:375) has proposed a modified definition of impassibility which is “immutability with regard to one’s feelings, or the qualities of one’s inner life.” In this sense, Sarot argues that God does have feelings (1990:368), but they do not affect his will or his actions.

Current English Bible translations<sup>8</sup> show that God experiences sorrow (Ge 6:6-7), regret (1Sa 15:11), and even changes His mind (Ex 32:12-14) which potentially challenges the doctrine of immutability by showing that God responds (i.e. by changing his mind regarding actions) to human experiences with emotion.

As the shift to the acceptance of the passibility of God began to take shape, English translations of the Bible shifted as well. In the earlier English Bible translations,<sup>9</sup> in certain passages where God is the subject of the Hebrew verb נָחַם,<sup>10</sup> God is seen as “repenting.”<sup>11</sup> After 1930, the translations began to adopt different descriptions such as “regret,” “be sorry,” “grieved,” or “change his mind.” What precipitated the change? Was it possible for God now to be sorry, or to express grief over an unanticipated decision made by his creation, or even over a decision that He Himself had made? Or, was this a result of enhanced lexical studies that introduced new lexical boundaries of the Hebrew נָחַם?

The present study agrees in principle with Fretheim’s conclusion that these changes were brought about by a new metaphoric shift that did not occur in exegetical methodology but actually in one’s own view of God Himself — in his person, character and attributes. And, this subjective view of God can be derived by one’s own personal and subjective experiences which help interpret the biblical text. It is this new personal understanding of God Himself that actually influences one’s own hermeneutical methodology, and ultimately exegetical conclusions.

The many discussions around the repentance of God commenced within the past century as the historical view of God’s impassibility was revisited.<sup>12</sup> The philosophical presuppositions of the church fathers were questioned by many, and some critics concluded that those presuppositions were the result of an inappropriate influence of

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<sup>8</sup> All the examples given here are from the NASB, although most other English translations carry near identical wording in those passages.

<sup>9</sup> A list of the major English Bible translations before 1930 from the GB 1599 translation to the JPS 1917 translation is given in Appendix B. The definition of “earlier” is pre-1930.

<sup>10</sup> Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12, 14; 1Sa 15:11, 35.

<sup>11</sup> In Ex 32:12, 14, the GB 1599 translation uses “change his mind” and the DRA 1899 translation prefers “be appeased.”

<sup>12</sup> For specific discussion on the repentance of God, see Kuyper, 1965:3-16, Kuyper, 1969:257-277, Davis, 1983, Fretheim, 1988:51, Chisholm, 1995:387-399, Barrick, 2001:149-166, Raney, 2003:105-115, Maier, 2004:127-143, and Willis, 1994:156-175.

Greek Hellenistic thought in the church fathers' development of the attributes of God. Since a new paradigm opened regarding the question of God's passibility, many began to ask important theological questions.

If God could feel, then could He be affected by his creation? How can one reconcile God's love with his burning wrath and anger? Is God immutable, and if so, then how is it possible for Him to "respond" to human actions of wickedness or righteousness? Is God impassible? Can God "feel" with emotions?

Usually, people have no difficulty with accepting the idea of God's love and compassion, since it is repeated throughout Scripture. However, when people encounter a life-changing or life-threatening dilemma, there is an immediate suspicion regarding the truth of God's goodness and love. When unexplainable suffering abounds, we turn to God for explanation. Unavoidably, the answers derived originate from a person's own perception of the character and nature of God. Since the existence of unexplainable and unjust suffering (subject to a person's point of view of "unjust") is not consistent with the character of a loving and compassionate God, then the answer must be found in the idea that current circumstances are not part of God's plan or purpose. The response then, is that the explanation from God must be that He also feels sorrow, regret, or even changes his mind as a result of circumstances on the earth. As the twentieth century greatly increased its propensity for man-made horror through the World Wars, this explanation accelerated Fretheim's "metaphoric shift" in hermeneutics and interpretation of Scripture by bringing the personal experience of suffering into the interpretation process.

When one presupposes that the accepted historical definition of impassibility and immutability rests on grammatical, lexical, contextual, and exegetical principles, one is left perplexed by clear statements in the text that seem to conflict with this definition (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; 1Sa 15:11, 35). Traditional approaches tended to handle the text systematically or metaphorically in the light of a view that the Bible is inerrant. In either case, the solution is not truly satisfactory as the resolution leads at least partially to accepting a mystery.

As history unfolds and human suffering abounds, the character of God will always remain a perplexity to many. When suffering people turn to the Bible for answers, the problem comes when biblical texts that define God's immutability (Nu 23:19; Mal 3:6),

sovereignty (Ps 135:6; Is 45:7); omniscience (Is 46:9-10; Jer 1:5); and seeming indifference (Pro 22:2; Ecc 7:14) collides with clear statements of his compassion and emotion (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 34:6-7). Is God the loving paternal father of Israel, or is He the benevolent and impassible sovereign Lord? Is one set of verses to be interpreted in light of the others, or vice-versa?

The concept of God's suffering love is a core tenet of the Christian faith, and has been either denied or ignored by most traditional theologians until the twentieth century (Oh, 1999:3). Before this time, the predominant view on this concept was God's impassibility. The primary reason for this was to lock the gates and prevent a theological assault on the precious doctrine of God's immutability. God somehow expresses love and judgment to his creation, while simultaneously being totally self-sufficient and unaffected by his creation. The primary hermeneutical principle used by most<sup>13</sup> theologians and commentators to handle many of the apparent direct textual contradictions (1Sa 15:11, 35 vs. 1Sa 15:29) as well as indications of God's unchanging yet remorseful character (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; 1Sa 15:11, 35) was that of anthropomorphic language.

After the publication of J. K. Mozley's (1926) survey on the impassibility of God, serious work and discussion progressed on the concept of God's repentance. Subsequent to World War II, discussion around the doctrine of God's impassibility flourished, which generated an enthusiastic exploration of the possibility of God's "suffering." Theologians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Kazoh Kitamori, Jürgen Moltmann, and Terrence Fretheim have advanced various versions of the concept that God suffers with us. In his standard work, *Die Reue Gottes*, Joachim Jeremias (1997<sup>14</sup>), concludes that God's compassion for his people is so strong that it results in a self-limitation of God's own will.

These works have been so widely received that it has been labeled a "New Orthodoxy".<sup>15</sup> Not all, however, have accepted this idea that God's compassion and

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<sup>13</sup> During the course of this study, this student discovered that the use of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language was the overwhelming, if not exclusive pre-1930 view of the repentance of God passages.

<sup>14</sup> This is the date of the reprinted edition. The book was originally published in 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Eugene Goetz (1986:385-389) actually declared the existence of a "New Orthodoxy," and has influenced many theologians in the past three decades. This new thinking has moved from the academic world to the pastoral as the twentieth century moved from a century of hope to a century of

even suffering necessitate his changing his purpose or will. Over the past fifty years, theology has been primarily divided into two camps: those who stress God's compassionate nature as defining his immutability, and those who stress God's immutability as defining His compassion. In essence, they are divided on the answer to the problem of theodicy: God is either not able or not willing to solve the problem of evil and suffering.

Those in the first camp who embrace the "New Orthodoxy" generally follow the principle that God suffers with us, and that we are in essence "partners" with Him in unfolding the future. In some sense, God is not fully responsible for the suffering of his creation, and is not able to alleviate that suffering. They generally put the emphasis on "not able" because of a hermeneutic that stresses the need for a partnership between God and man (immanence over transcendence). Therefore, this camp holds that God can change and still be consistent within Himself because He is holding to a consistent set of internal feelings and emotions.

The second camp is generally made up of those who hold that God's will is totally unchanging, and rejects any notion of a "partnership" between God and his creation. On the biblical texts that speak of God "repenting," they would hold to a hermeneutic of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language. They would also put the emphasis of God being "not willing" to alleviate suffering. Unlike the first camp, these would hold to a hermeneutic of God's "otherness" from his creation and the priority of his will over any and all circumstances (transcendence over immanence). This understanding of God lets them revert to the traditional anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language. However, some theologians in this camp feel that this is a minimalist approach to the problem (Cole, G., 2000:16-27). The exegetical, theological, and philosophical tension in the passages that speak of God's repentance remain unresolved along with the discontinuity they seem to have with clear immutability passages (Nu 23:19; 1Sa 15:29).

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despair with two world wars, the introduction of nuclear weapons, AIDS, and countless conflicts. Theologians and pastors could now conclude that a God of love must be a suffering God (see Ngien, 1997:38-42). This "New Orthodoxy" has stimulated much debate and new exegesis of the passages which describe the  $\text{דָּבָר}$  of God.

Because of this division,<sup>16</sup> it is exigent to continue to study the issue of God's נחם and explore whether there is possibly a different exegetical solution that still holds to the priority of God's unqualified immutability.

### **1.3 The scope of the present study**

The scope of this study is to test whether there can be an exegetical solution to the tension between God's immutable purposes and the nature of God's reaction (through repentance, change of mind, or regret) to the decisions and actions of people without the use of anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language. This is not to say that views that rely on anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language are not viable. It is also not in the scope of this study to refute or negate other theological views that provide a relief to the theological tension of God's "repentance."

The centre of the debate over God's repentance (or change of mind) is the Hebrew word נחם (in the Niphal) which can be translated "comfort," "compassion," or "sorrow."<sup>17</sup> The focus of this study will be on proposing the meaning "comfort" or "compassion" for the Hebrew word נחם (in the Niphal) in specific contexts related to the theological tension of God's "repentance" in response to the decisions and actions of people, and then to have that proposition tested against four specific Old Testament passages (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; Nu 23:19; 1Sa 15:11, 29, 35). These passages are from the so-called historical books, where the issues of God's deeds in history are described.

### **1.4 Methodology**

Understanding and interpreting the Old Testament requires careful study and a sound methodology. This is an exceptionally arduous task, because of the limited availability of lexical material on ancient Hebrew manuscripts (as compared with the New Testament Greek manuscripts), and the number of hapax-legomena. With these obstacles, how is the serious exegete to proceed when confronted with a sovereign God who is not like man, yet "repents" or "regrets?" While there is an earnest desire for the answer to be found in some intense lexical scrutiny, this alone leaves the exegete unsatisfied. The answer lies in one's understanding of Old Testament

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<sup>16</sup> The division is between the "New Orthodox" camp and the "Anthropopathic / Anthropomorphic" camp.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 4 — A Lexical Study of נחם.

theology, using a valid methodology of exegesis and taking into account the relevant context.

### **1.4.1 Presuppositions**

Regardless of the methodology one chooses to approach a study of the Old Testament, there is a clear need for presuppositions to be stated and defined up front.

The presuppositions of this study are listed below:<sup>18</sup>

1. God (the God of the Bible—Yahweh) exists, and theology is the study of God. The importance of this can be explained by the following syllogism. The existence of God (major premise) supports the study of God (minor premise), and vice-versa. If there is no God (major premise), then the conclusion must be that there is no theology, and thus no need for research regarding what God said about Himself in the passages that use the Hebrew word **יְהוָה**.
2. God has revealed Himself to man propositionally through his written word, the Bible. While the Creator God has revealed Himself experientially (Ps 19:1), this is called General Revelation and is subject to the experience of the creature. If God is to be known by all people of all time, and if He is to be known in a way that defies change, then He will be known through a common medium that transcends the ages in a way that is unified, consistent, and systematic. God made Himself known in the past through his word, which was either written or spoken through prophets and, ultimately, through his own Son (Heb. 1:1-2). Now He makes Himself known propositionally through the Scriptures, and specifically (as it pertains to this study) through the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Old Testament. These Scriptures were given utilising human communication patterns and thought.
3. While not exhaustive or by any means a complete work of the history of the world or a history of Israel, the Old Testament is to be taken as historical narrative and read as selective historiography. In other words, God chose

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<sup>18</sup> The following list reflects and follows the line of thinking of both Merrill (2006: 22-27) and Kaiser (1978a:1-40) in their quest for developing an Old Testament Theology, and specifically the development of a centre.

which narratives were to be recorded as well as the amount of detail and specific point of view in each narrative. It can be regarded as a *Heilsgeschichte* or “history of salvation”<sup>19</sup> and chronicles how Yahweh deals with the world through the nation of Israel (Merrill, 2006:26). While some theologians assert that this sacred history does not require veracity or is not a historical reality (von Rad, 2001:195-215), it is important that a historically accurate timeline<sup>20</sup> be a part of developing an interpretation of God’s progressive revelation.

4. God’s word is inextricably tied to actual historical events. The written revealed word must be synthesised with historical facts and events, and one does not subsume the other in deriving a theological meaning. Facts devoid of words are blind, and words without facts are vacuous (Goldingay, 1981:74-77). The point is that an exegetical word study must presuppose the historical factuality of the statements themselves which are under study.
5. The Bible (both the Old and New Testaments) is the written word of God, and is the means by which He propositionally reveals Himself to mankind. The Bible asserts that it is authoritative for life and has divine authorship, along with its inscripturation by man (Jn 10:35; 2Ti 3:15-17; 2Pe 1:20-21) which must be presuppositionally received as true.
6. The Hebrew Masoretic canon (MT), represented by the text of the BHS, is the most reliable Old Testament text. Other canons, such as the Greek Septuagint (LXX), can be useful in the exegetical process, but they do not provide the primary source material for study.
7. This is an Old Testament study. However, Old Testament and New Testament theologies must be compatible. This study is biblical-theological, and will analyse the self-disclosures of God in both Old and New Testament passages, which is Biblical Theology (Vos, 1975:5). Without the Old Testament, there is no meaning and foundation for the New Testament, and

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<sup>19</sup> Merrill (2006: 26) calls this “sacred history.”

<sup>20</sup> While it is quite clear that not everything in the Bible can be regarded as factual statements, such as parables and allegories, this statement is meant to indicate the historical accuracy of the narratives as recorded.

without the New Testament, there is no culmination to redemption for the modern-day believer.

8. There have been many nuanced positions taken on the doctrine of the impassibility of God over the ages. This study will not enter into the theological debate over the existence of God's emotions, but rather will explore certain possible lexical and syntactical meanings of the Hebrew word נחם (in the Niphal) in the "repentance of God" passages in the four historical texts of the Old Testament which would resolve the theological tension between God's "repentance" or "change of mind" and his immutability.

### **1.4.2 The approach of the study**

This study will follow the methodology of Walter Kaiser (2008:18) and James Hamilton (2010), and also incorporates the ideas of Vos (1975:5), which maintains that biblical theology is a type of exegetical theology that deals with the process of God's self-revelation throughout the entire Bible. Kaiser uses a diachronic / synchronic approach to arrive at a centre or theme of the Old Testament, and this centre of God's disclosure is found in the "promise-plan" of God found throughout Scripture. He emphasises that this is not found through the discipline of Systematic Theology, but rather through a biblical-theological approach.

Since Kaiser's initial work in 1978 on developing a biblical centre for the Old Testament, there has been additional discussion on this subject. Elmer Martens (2007:684-691) also advocates a whole-Bible theology, and agrees with Kaiser on the use of biblical theology in interpretation. In addition, Kaiser's (2008) refinement on the unity of the promise-plan of God devotes one hundred-fifty-four pages to the New Testament while his earlier work only devoted seven pages to the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Subsequent to Kaiser's most recent work in 2008, James Hamilton (2010) developed a biblical theology that follows Kaiser's approach to a centre, and develops a theme which is reflected in his title *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*. Hamilton has built on Kaiser's theme of "Promise-Plan" in that it includes the polar ideas of judgment and grace. This study accepts the premise that the theological theme that runs

through the Old Testament, and thus affects every context is the idea of grace within judgment. This premise is built on the supposition that all of God's grace originates from his promise (Ge 3:15) and its ultimate fulfilment.

The methodology used in this study will follow that of Walter Kaiser (1981) and focuses on the contextual, syntactical, and lexical methodology of exegesis. The study will survey and synthesise the most current lexical studies of the Hebrew word נָחַם, as well as create a detailed syntactical and contextual analysis of Ge 6:6-7, Ex 32:12-14, Nu 23:19, and 1Sa 15:11-35 using Kaiser's methodology. This analysis will be exercised within the framework of the theme of "God's grace within his judgment."

## **1.5 Problem statement**

The research problem is as follows: Is it possible to harmonise the biblical texts that specifically speak of God's repentance with those that affirm his non-repentance, full sovereignty, and immutability without using a hermeneutic of anthropopathism?

If such a harmonisation is possible, then how does one relate the "divine repentance" passages to those passages that affirm God's immutability? Is it possible for both truths to coexist without doing violence to either one? Is there an exegetical solution that has been untried or untested, apart from a hermeneutic of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism?

## **1.6 Aims and objectives**

The aim of this study is to establish whether there is a solution to the apparent contradiction of the divine repentance passages in four historical texts in the Old Testament apart from the use of a hermeneutic that uses anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language. In order to reach this aim, several objectives will have to be accomplished:

1. Gain an understanding of the theological shifts in the idea of the impassibility of God that have occurred throughout church history, and subsequent implications on the view of divine repentance.
2. Describe Kaiser and Hamilton's unifying theme of God's judgment and redemptive grace throughout the Old Testament.

3. Perform a survey and analysis of the recent lexical work on the meaning of the Hebrew word נָחַם in the Niphal stem with God as the subject. Particular attention will be given to the lexical work of Parunak and Simian-Yofre.
4. Determine whether there is a viable view that maintains that God remains immutable and does not “repent” in response to human actions, which is consistent with the literal meaning of the Hebrew נָחַם, and does not rely on an interpretation that requires anthropomorphic or anthropopathic language and does not conclude with an apparent paradox or antinomy.

## 1.7 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that an exegetical approach that considers biblical-theological aspects can offer a solution to the apparent contradictions in the repentance of God passages in four historical texts (Ge 6:6-7. Ex 32:12-14; Nu 23:19; 1Sa 15:11, 29, 35) between God’s “repentance” and immutability. The study will propose a solution using a preferred meaning for the Hebrew word נָחַם in the Niphal stem with God as the subject in the four historical texts, and then it will inductively test that solution using a biblical-theological and exegetical methodology.

This hypothesis maintains the immutability and sovereignty of God over his creation, while still maintaining exegetical “sense” in its interpretation in context.

## 1.8 Research plan

After the introductory observations in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 will survey the history of the arguments regarding the impassibility of God as well as the repentance of God, and their impact on current views of the nature and character of God, and their impact on current English Bible translations. Chapter 3 will briefly summarise the work of Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton relative to the idea of a theme or centre that runs throughout Scripture. It will also describe the methodology used in the study by considering the aspects of a thematic approach to biblical exegesis.

This will be followed by a survey of the recent lexical analysis of the Hebrew word נָחַם in Chapter 4, which will describe the various uses and the ranges of meaning of the Hebrew word. Chapter 5 continues with an exegetical study to effectively define the

influence of the near and far contexts, syntax, and lexemes on each key passage, while also analysing the theological implications of each text.

Finally, Chapter 6 will provide a summary of conclusions, as well as implications of the study. In addition, recommendation for further exploration will be offered.

The chapter division of the study will be as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Impact of the Impassibility Debate on the נחם of God
3. Judgment and Grace—A Consistent Theme
4. A Lexical Study of נחם
5. Exegetical Analysis of God's נחם
6. Conclusion

## **Chapter 2**

# **The impact of the impassibility debate on the interpretation of God's אקא**

Prior to the twentieth century, the impassibility of God was standard fare for most of orthodox Christian theology. It has only been in the last hundred years that the doctrine has not only been questioned, but solidly rejected. Some recent theologians such as Terrence Fretheim, Richard Rice, Clark Pinnock, and Greg Boyd not only reject God's impassibility, but also hold to the position that God is *not absolutely* omniscient.

The ongoing discussion around the impassibility of God has been limited to the realm of philosophical theology (Snider, 2007:1). This raises the question whether these scholars come to their view through exegesis which develops their theology, or whether they come to this position through a philosophy before finding exegetical support for their position.

Before an answer can be given, it is critical to reflect on the beginning of the historical origins of debate on the impassibility of God that broke nearly a century ago.

### **2.1 Theological basis of divine impassibility**

At the centre of the argument over God's impassibility is the identity of the source of this doctrine. In the early part of the twentieth century, theologians began to excogitate on the idea that Hellenistic philosophy not only penetrated orthodoxy, but actually was used to frame the theology of the Patristic theologians, which was carried from the first century forward.

The earliest pastoral and theological writings of the church demonstrate that impassibility was a part of the early church's doctrine of God (Snider, 2007). The history of the doctrine of God's impassibility is recounted from the apostolic age up until the turn of the twentieth century in a thorough work by J. K. Mozley (1926). During the twentieth century, many scholars have since investigated this doctrine in the history of the church which resulted in opening the discussion to the possibility of God's passibility.

### 2.1.1 Divergent views on divine passibility in Greek thought

The reaction against the doctrine of God's impassibility was clearly articulated in 1924, when William Temple (1924:269) wrote, "[W]e have to recognize that Aristotle's 'apathetic God' was enthroned in men's minds, and no idol has been so hard to destroy." This idea, once formed, grew in intensity: F. H. Brabant (1928:334) warned, "It becomes theologians to be cautious in accepting the gifts of the Greeks." This growing concern then turned into the conclusion that the idea of God's impassibility is a serious error. "Among the many Greek philosophic ideas imported into Christian theology, and into Alexandrine Jewish theology before it, is the idea of the *impassible* God (*apathes theos*), and this idea furnishes us with a particularly striking illustration of the damage done by the assumption of alien philosophical presuppositions when they are applied to Christian theology." (Pollard, 1955:356). This conclusion became the foundation for the repudiation of the doctrine of impassibility, and became the starting point for many passibilist theologians.<sup>21</sup>

Pollard sees that the unchangeable nature of Greek philosophy became a magnet of sorts which pulled the newly germinating Christian theology into its own views of a metaphysically derived god who is not only unchanging, but unfeeling and uncaring for the world that he created. In particular, this influence began in the second, third, and fourth centuries, when the "theologising" was in the hands of men who had been trained in the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic world, and who refused to do intellectually what Justin Martyr had refused to do literally, that is to doff the academic dress of the philosopher." (Pollard, 1955:353). As a result of the acceptance of this new understanding of the corruption of "pagan dogma," the resulting theology (of the impassibility of God) had to die (Edwards, 1978:313).

But, is this assumption true? And, what caused a sudden interest in "corrupt" influence in what has been considered to be orthodox teachings for almost two thousand years? While the answer to the second question would require a separate work,<sup>22</sup> the answer

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<sup>21</sup> See Pollard (1955:353-364), Kuyper (1969:257-277); Edwards (1978:305-313); House (1980:409-415); and Willis (1994:156-175).

<sup>22</sup>Gavrilyuk (2004:1) does provide a brief statement on the philosophical and theological trends in the early twentieth century that created a swell of opinion toward divine passibility. These trends, combined with two world wars and increased focus on oppressed people created a need for theologians to provide an answer to the perpetual and pervasive nature of human suffering against the love and justice of God.

to the first is given a thorough treatment by Paul Gavrilyuk in *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*.

In this work, Gavrilyuk (2004:2) concedes the contemporary view that rejects the concept of divine impassibility. He also agrees that the standard line of criticism by current theologians is the association of patristic thinking with Hellenistic philosophy, where the term “impassible” allegedly meant the absence of emotions and indifference to the world, which surely cannot be an attribute of the Christian God.

The first point that Gavrilyuk raises is the lack of a unified account of how the Hellenistic schools defined and described the divine emotions and divine involvement with mankind. He illustrates the point by highlighting the competing views of the Epicurean, Stoic, and Middle Platonist schools which were independently proffered based on their individual beliefs.

While the Epicureans frequently described emotions using negative terms, they did not hesitate to give the gods emotionally coloured experiences regarded in their moral theory as positive (Gavrilyuk, 2004:23). This ideal was based on the principle of the greatest possible pleasure, which is also achieving the principle of the least possible pain. The gods were perfectly happy, and thus posed no threat to humankind. Therefore, they ought to be worshipped according to local customs, but they should never be feared. Epicurus postulated anthropomorphic, corporeal deities, not completely devoid of emotions due to their heightened state of joy, yet whose existence had no bearing on the material world (2004:25). This position differed greatly from the Peripatetics, who promoted the ideal of *metriopatheia*, the moderation of passions, the Stoics, who argued that all *pathe* were irrational and unnatural, and later Platonists, who developed a complex metaphysical system.

This difference was acutely recognized and understood by the patristic writers. Gavrilyuk (2004:26) notes that Jerome wrote that the doctrine of the soul’s *apatheia* was the bone of contention between Stoics and the Peripatetics, that the exact meaning of the Stoic technical term *apatheia* was disputed among both ancients and moderns. The issue is whether *apatheia* meant to eradicate all emotion.

While the role that emotions played in all human relations and the formation of character was controversial among all the philosophical schools, proponents of the

theory that the Patristic Fathers fell into Hellenistic Philosophy find no support in their claim that the Stoics opted for *apatheia* as the moral ideal. This idea is never applied to God in any extant Stoic sources (Gavrilyuk, 2004:29).

A second point brought out by Gavrilyuk is that the Stoics utilized the traditional terminology of the mythical gods, and they used both personal and impersonal descriptions rather indiscriminately (Gavrilyuk, 2004:29-30). They were the first to develop a detailed theory of divine providence, and fought against the Epicureans on the subject of random activity versus divine intervention as causes that lead to the order and design of the cosmos. The Middle Platonists joined the Stoics in their criticism of Epicurean theology, yet simultaneously argued zealously against what they considered to be inconsistent Stoic terminology for describing the divine realm. Nevertheless, both the Stoics and the Platonists agreed on the reality of divine providence. God's perfect and impartial care was for all people, and not just for a preferred group, and He did so by means of his intermediaries because it is both unnecessary and impossible for God to employ direct intervention in human affairs.

Basically, the Epicurean gods experienced and shared pleasurable emotions, yet remained unconcerned and uninvolved with humanity. The Stoic deity impartially extended providential care to the cosmos. And finally, the god of the Platonists was totally transcendent, human emotions included, yet intervened in the world through intermediaries. Since the Hellenistic philosophers failed to reach agreement with one another on their variegated perspectives on the character and nature of the gods, how is it possible that these splintered factions were able to influence the Patristic Fathers on the single attribute of impassibility?

The final difficulty is shown by Gavrilyuk (2004:36) when he raises the point that Hellenization promoted the idea of the suffering and dying gods of the mysteries. Passion narratives were quite frequent in Hellenistic literature. In summary, Gavrilyuk concludes that the combination of complex philosophical thought and the picture of suffering and passionate gods of the mystery cults prevented any agreement between the Fathers and the Hellenistic philosophers because the philosophers did not agree with themselves.

## 2.1.2 Anti-anthropomorphic tendencies in the LXX

After demonstrating the erroneous and misleading nature of the claim of direct Hellenistic influence on Patristic doctrine, Gavriilyuk proceeds to show how the Scriptures themselves support the issue of a passable yet unchangeable God.

It is axiomatic that the Bible ascribes a wider range of emotions to God than any philosophically minded Hellenist could conceive (Gavriilyuk, 2004:37). If Platonism had infested the theological thinking of the Patristics, then anthropomorphisms<sup>23</sup> and anthropopathisms<sup>24</sup> would be the norm rather than the exception. The Scriptures, however, present caution. While the Old Testament shows God as being fully in control of his emotions, his emotions are of a particular nature. He loves without becoming emotionally dependent upon the object of his love, and does not seek gratification of his own desires in love. In the same way, God is not capricious in his anger. It is always expressed as righteous judgment upon human sin and rebellion (Gavriilyuk, 2004:37).

The biblical writers of the Old Testament were incessantly repetitive in their emphasis on the staggering differences between the living God of Israel and lifeless idols. Yahweh does not die (Dt 33:27), tire (Isa 40:28), grow weary (Isa 40:28), or forget (Ps 9:12). Even with this emphasis, there are still numerous biblical texts that present conflicting views of divine impassibility and immutability,<sup>25</sup> and the tension arises only when they are assembled together and considered systematically as a whole.

The translators of the Septuagint (LXX) were keenly aware of the problem of anthropomorphism. They may have regarded a visual representation of God as idolatrous (Ex 20:4-6). Because of this, the LXX gives evidence of anti-

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<sup>23</sup>The term “anthropomorphism” is defined as “The attribution of human characteristics to God, specifically the conceptualization of God as having aspects of human (Gk. *ánthrōpos*) form (Gk. *morphē*), but not human emotions (such as love or anger), called anthropopathism.” (Tucker, 2000:66).

<sup>24</sup>The definition of the corresponding term “anthropopathism” is “the attribute of human emotions, such as anger, grief, and joy to God.” (Unger, 1988:81).

<sup>25</sup> Gavriilyuk (2004:38) notes that these passages are not conflicting descriptions between Greek and Hebrew ways of thought, but arise from within the biblical text itself. In these passages, God is said to repent (Ge 6:5-7; Ex 32:12-14; Dt 32:36; Jdg 2:18; 1Sa 15:11; Ps 90:13; 106:45; 135:14; Jer 42:10; Hos 11:8-9; Jon 3:9-10; 4:2) yet also is simultaneously incapable of repenting (Nu 23:19; 1Sa 15:29; Hos 13:14). God changes his mind yet is also unchangeable (Ps 102:26-27; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:11-12; Jas 1:17; Heb 6:17).

anthropomorphic and anti-anthropopathic bias. This is demonstrated in particular by the work of Charles Fritsch (1943:9-20), who showed that the Alexandrian translators were strongly averse to including divine emotions or actions that were theologically problematic. This aversion was fomented by a dual track of parallel traditions of anti-anthropomorphic tendencies in pre-Christian Judaism (Fritsch, 1943:65):

*There appear to be then two streams of anti-anthropomorphic development in Jewish history. One goes its own way through the Old Testament into the rabbinical period, confined to the Hebrew and Aramaic languages and guided by the ritualistic and theological developments within Judaism. The other, resulting from contact with Greek thought and idiom, continues until it becomes identified with the abstractions of Alexandrian philosophy.*

The first tradition that Fritsch discusses is supported by Ginzberg (2010), who asserts that the writers of the LXX merely followed the men of the Great Synagogue who established the Old Testament canon. Ginzberg's view implies that the avoidance of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism in the LXX cannot be traced to the alleged influence of Greek philosophy, but rather it was a refinement of religious ideas rooted in Jewish soil.

The use of the Greek ἰλάσθη “propitiate” in place of the Hebrew נחם<sup>26</sup> “comfort,” “repent” is found in Ex 32:12-14. The Hebrew text would read “and the LORD repented<sup>27</sup> (נחם) of the evil that He planned to bring on his people” while the LXX translation reads “and the LORD was propitiated (ἰλάσθη) of / from the evil that He planned to bring on his people.” Similar examples of this tendency are changing from divine anger חרה “be angry” in Ge 18:30 to the phrase μή τι “let it be nothing [to you]”, and the change from the Hebrew word קִנְיָה “wrath” “that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel” into the LXX Greek word ἀμάρτια “sin” “that there be no sin among the children of Israel” in Nu 1:53.<sup>28</sup> This variation of translation by the LXX translators is significant, with the majority of the translations seeking to tone down, if not minimize the anthropomorphic conception of God's repentance. This, coupled with the fact that the New Testament only has one negative reference to God's

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<sup>26</sup> The heart of this study is on this specific Hebrew word.

<sup>27</sup> This assumes the pre-twentieth century translations of נחם such as the KJV or ASV.

<sup>28</sup> See Fritsch (1943:17-35) for discussion of these and other passages in the Pentateuch.

נחם (He 7:21 cf. Ps 110:4 [109 in the MT]) seems to support the idea that the LXX is a witness to God's immutability (Argyle, 1964:367).

### 2.1.3 Anti-anthropomorphic tendencies of Philo

Gavrilyuk (2004:42-46) evaluates the pivotal role of Philo of Alexandria regarding the question of anthropomorphisms in Scripture. In his evaluation, he demonstrates that while there are many who read Philo as a dangerous Hellenizer who brought the Hebrew text into submission to pagan philosophy,<sup>29</sup> a careful examination of Philo's exegetical method reveals someone who systematically expressed and developed already present anti-anthropomorphic and anti-anthropopathic tendencies in the Jewish world. This can be seen in Philo's handling of the LXX texts of Ge 6:5-7 (Philo, 1995:159-160):

*Perhaps some very wicked persons will suspect that the lawgiver is here speaking enigmatically, when he says that the Creator repented of having created man, when he beheld their wickedness; on which account he determined to destroy the whole race. But let those who adopt such opinions as these know, that they are making light of and extenuating the offences of these men of old time, by reason of their own excessive impiety; for what can be a greater act of wickedness than to think that the unchangeable God can be changed?*

Philo was not a pioneering Hellenizer, which was inconsistent with his character. In actuality, he stood in the respectable Jewish tradition of interpretations that resisted anthropomorphism, and instead explained the apparent change in "consideration" by God was not new, but rather the expression of a righteous penalty on deserving human guilt.

The approach of Philo harmonized with the general tendency of the translators of the LXX to mitigate and even eliminate anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms found in the Hebrew text.

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<sup>29</sup> In addition to Gavrilyuk's (2004:42, n. 62) references of R. B. Edwards and H. Kraft, also see Pollard (1955:356) and Kuyper (1965:8; 1969:262-263).

## **2.1.4 Conclusion: impassibility in Christian theology**

Prior to the Reformation, classical<sup>30</sup> Christian theologians agreed that God cannot suffer. The predominant, if not orthodox, view of God was that He is impassible. The passages with God's "passibility" or "repentance" in the Old Testament were viewed anthropomorphically or anthropopathically.

It has been shown, however, that it is misleading to think that the early Christian theologians had the dilemma of choosing between the uninvolved and unemotional God of the Hellenes and the emotional suffering God of the Hebrews. The passionate clinging to impassibility by the early church was not really on exegetical grounds, but rather was the result of strong anti-anthropomorphic tendencies within the Jewish community. Greek thought might have had some influence on the early church, but it has not been proven that Hellenistic thought from polytheists had a direct impact on the Christian Fathers embracing of the doctrine of impassibility. The theory of orthodox theology's fall into Hellenistic philosophy must be rejected as a mistaken interpretation of the development of Christian doctrine.

## **2.2 Theological basis of passibility**

From its start, the impassibility of God was standard orthodoxy for the Christian church. This idea was crystallised with the rejection of patripassianism<sup>31</sup> in the third century. In subsequent Christological controversies, the idea of theopaschitism<sup>32</sup> was also condemned for arguing that God had suffered (McWilliams, 1980:35). This prevailing view of God's impassibility carried on throughout the Reformation. Recently, scholarship has challenged the doctrine of impassibility on the grounds of undue influence by Hellenistic thinking on the early Church Fathers.

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<sup>30</sup> The word "classical" here is a general term meaning the mainstream Christian theologians that hold to the beliefs and doctrines of the Evangelical Christian church.

<sup>31</sup> Patripassianism is a view associated with monarchianism and modalism, which denies the distinction of the three persons in one God and consequently maintains that it was the Father himself that suffered on the cross. (Deist, 1987:125)

<sup>32</sup> Theopaschitism was a disputed teaching, which arose during the sixth century and was associated with the slogan "one of the Trinity was crucified." (McGrath, 1998:354). The history of theopaschitism (God suffers) is very complex, yet was eventually sanctioned at the fifth general council in Constantinople in 553 B.C. (Sarot, 1990:373).

At the end of the nineteenth century other views began to emerge. The enigma of the “divine repentance” passages became more prominent as God’s “passibility” gained acceptance among many theologians. There was an effort to move away from anthropomorphism in these texts, while still adhering to the tenet of God’s immutability. Solutions offered range from a covenantal perspective – which has these texts showing God “changing” in order to be immutable to his covenant – to Open Theism, which discards the idea of God’s immutability relative to His will and actions, and actually changes His mind because of influence by free human decisions.

This section will present a brief summary of the developments of the various theological solutions to God’s passibility since the Reformation.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2.1 The views of Calvin and Luther

During the Reformation, perhaps one of the most towering figures and prolific thinkers was John Calvin. In his commentary on Genesis, Calvin defines the concept of divine accommodation (Calvin, 1996:248-249):

*The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding him. For since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that, for our sake, he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God, easily appears from this single consideration, that nothing happens which is by him unexpected or unforeseen. The same reasoning, and remark, applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God’s hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity.*

Calvin’s point is that God’s “repentance” is a figure of speech which he defines as that, “which represents God as transferring himself what is peculiar to human nature, is called ἀνθρωποπάθεια” (Calvin, 1996:249). The idea of using anthropomorphism and anthropopathism was driven by Calvin’s “control beliefs” in the doctrines that describe God’s infinite, unchanging, and passionless nature. The boundaries of these *a priori*

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<sup>33</sup> A thorough treatment of the theological development of the passibility of God since the Reformation is beyond the scope of this work. The goal here is to sketch a few of the contributors to the discussion and follow the development of the argument for God’s passibility up to the end of the twentieth century.

doctrines would not allow the texts which describe God's נחם to be interpreted with their *prima facie* value (Cole, G., 2000:19-20).

Likewise, Luther (1960:45) was also uncompromising on the subject of God's immutability and strongly held that the affections of God were portrayed with anthropopathisms:

*God in his essence is altogether unknowable; nor is it possible to define or put into words what he is, though we burst in the effort. It is for this reason that God lowers himself to the level of our weak comprehension and presents himself to us in images, in coverings, as it were, in simplicity adapted to a child, that in some measure it may be possible for him to be known by us ....*

Again, he comments further that there is an obligation to accept anthropomorphisms as an almost divinely inspired hermeneutic (Luther, 1960:46).

*That Scripture thus assigns to God the form, voice, actions, emotions, etc., of a human being not only serves to show consideration for the uneducated and the weak; but we great and learned men, who are versed in the Scriptures, are also obliged to adopt these simple images, because God has presented them to us and has revealed himself to us through them.*

The influence of these two men, especially in the circles of Reformed Theology was felt for centuries. Protestant scholars such as C. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, W. Shedd, A. Strong, and L. Berkhof all allege that passages that speak about God's repenting are to be taken either as figurative language or anthropomorphic, and thus are not to be taken seriously (Duncan, 1990:4-11). This idea of "unchangeableness," which is expressed and pictured in the act of repentance, continued to dominate Catholic, Protestant, and even Jewish thought from the first century A. D. until the introduction of process theology<sup>34</sup> in the twentieth century (Edwards, 1978:305).

### **2.2.2 The argument for God's passibility**

The discussion of God's passibility came about at the end of the nineteenth century and gained much strength and momentum into the twentieth century, creating a "modern revolution" of sorts (Wondra, 1964:28). As this revolution began to take

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<sup>34</sup> Process Theology is defined in Section 3.1.2. For further reading, see Grudem (1994:166-167) and Ware (1985:175-196).

shape, various scholars began to contribute to the discussion. Lester Kuyper (1965:13) was convinced that the early church fathers' reticence toward the idea of God's repentance was contaminated with the speculations of Greek philosophy, and saw Philo as dismissing the Hebrew sense of repentance for נחם and the use of the LXX's choice of "anger" as a device to communicate man's wickedness (1965:8). He further stated that post-Reformation Protestantism relied on "devious exegesis" based on the speculations of the legacy of Greek Platonic and neo-Platonic thought to avoid the obvious statement of change in God's manner of dealing with his people (1965:13).

During the middle of the twentieth century, the alleged Greek influence on the Patristic Fathers and prior scholarship became a popular stance and was fully embraced by many. Many scholars considered the idea of anthropomorphic conceptions of God "primitive" because these conceptions render meaningless the attributes of love, wrath, mercy, justice, and holiness (Pollard, 1955:360). God's impassibility and all its variations were now said to have originated not from Scripture, but from Greek philosophy (Edwards, 1978:305).

The difficulty of understanding the implied passibility of God in the "divine repentance" passages and the previous anthropomorphic and anthropopathic interpretations of the Hebrew נחם continued to draw a sharp focus on these texts. Many scholars now focused their attention on the problem of the repentance of God.

## **2.3 The passibility debate and English translations and commentaries**

Until the twentieth century, the impassibility of God was a foundation of orthodoxy. In addition, the idea that the Bible uses anthropomorphism and anthropopathism to describe God was widely accepted. In all passages that speak of God expressing נחם (in the Niphal stem), the Hebrew word was translated either with a form of "comfort" or "repent."

### **2.3.1 Post Reformation commentaries up to the twentieth century**

In most English Bible translations prior to the twentieth century, the Niphal Hebrew נחם is overwhelmingly translated "repent" in the repentance of God passages. Both Calvin

(1996:249), and Luther (1960:45-46) had no trouble with the translation “repent” for the Niphal Hebrew נָחַם, because they held to the need for the Divine to portray Himself in terms peculiar to human nature.

From Calvin and Luther’s sixteenth-century writings, this idea of translating the Niphal Hebrew נָחַם as the anthropopathic “repent” carried through to the seventeenth century with the Baptist John Gill (2010), who held to the repentance of God being an anthropopathism. Even John Wesley (2010), who deviated from some Calvinist foundations, spoke of the repentance of God as being language “in the manner of men” that does not in any way speak of passion or change of mind.

The eighteenth century continued to reflect the metaphorical language of God’s נָחַם with commentators such as Matthew Henry (1935:53), who defined the repentance of God as an expression after the manner of men which in no way disrespects the honour of God’s immutability. In the nineteenth century, anthropomorphic and anthropopathic interpretations of God’s repentance continued with Marcus Dods (1888:60), who said that while the repentance of God is used as an anthropomorphism, we have no such belief that the expression itself is actually true.

In addition, two widely used Old Testament commentaries from the nineteenth century — *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown’s Old Testament Commentary* and *Keil and Delitzsch’s Commentary on the Old Testament* were strong proponents of anthropopathism as the correct interpretation of God’s repentance (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, 1961:90; Keil; 2001:88).

While an exhaustive study of the views of all commentators from the Reformation to the twentieth century are not represented here, this survey does show a consistency of anthropomorphic thinking relative to the נָחַם of God and the idea of impassibility as a key to orthodox thinking for the four centuries following the Reformation.

### **2.3.2 The influx of Aristotelian philosophy**

Up to the Reformation, Christian orthodoxy remained relatively stable in its views of immutability, impassibility, and the use of anthropomorphism, but there was a concern that developed directly after the death of Calvin. It was previously shown in Section 2.1.1 that the development of orthodox theology was not influenced by pagan Hellenistic thinking about God. There is, however, a similar argument involving a

different Hellenistic influence on orthodox thinking and doctrine that does have merit. This is the idea that scholars and theologians who were still defining and articulating doctrine accepted Aristotelian philosophy as valid input for systematisation and interpretation of Scripture.

After the death of John Calvin, a noted professor of theology at the Genevan Academy named Theodore Beza (1519-1605) systematised and presented a rationally coherent history of Reformed Theology. The result of this was a tightly argued and rationally defensible account of Calvin's theology, but it was developed using Aristotelian logic (McGrath, 1998:172). Beza's Aristotelian thought most probably arose from Paduan Aristotelianism from expatriated Reformed Italians, although Beza definitely leaned this way in his formative years as a French humanist (Mallinson, 2003:56-57).

The introduction of Greek philosophy in analysing and developing doctrine led to the scholastic approach to theology. Under Beza, there was a concern for a systematic method. In a turn of events, an idea which was previously distasteful to Calvin and Luther — Aristotelianism — was now made a serious ally in the defence of the faith against both Lutheran and Roman Catholic opponents. As a result of this acceptance, many Calvinist writers turned to Aristotle, in the hope that this new method would cause Reformed theology to be more firmly grounded. This new thought resulted in the rise of four major characteristics (McGrath, 1998:169):

1. Human reason was assigned a major role in the exploration and defence of Christian theology.
2. Christian theology was presented as a logically coherent and rationally defensible system, derived from syllogistic deductions based upon known axioms. In other words, theology began from first principles and proceeded to deduce its doctrines on their basis.
3. Theology was understood to be grounded upon Aristotelian philosophy, and particularly Aristotelian insights into the nature of method; later Reformed writers are better described as philosophical, rather than biblical theologians.

4. Theology became oriented toward metaphysical and speculative questions, especially relating to the nature of God, God's will for humanity and creation, and above all the doctrine of predestination.

What transpired during the seventeenth century was a natural drift from the primacy of exposition of Scripture (Calvin and Luther), to concern for method and the integration of philosophy. The effect of this drift did not occur immediately, but was gradually felt within the next few centuries.

### **2.3.3 The change of the English translation of נחם in the divine repentance passages**

For some four centuries after the Reformation, theologians were consistent in upholding God's sovereignty and immutability. The idea of God's passibility was not a consideration, and the passages that speak of God's נחם were consistently translated with the word "repent" in English Bible translations.

Although translations used the word "repent," these "repentance of God" passages were considered to be anthropopathic, and thus the idea of God literally repenting was rejected. Therefore, through an anthropopathic interpretation, God's passibility was not accepted. To allow for God's passibility was to invite his mutability into the text as well through the language of repentance. This has already been argued in Section 2.1.

Appendix B shows a survey of how eight English Bible translations from the fifteenth century through the early (pre-1950) twentieth century translated the Niphal Hebrew נחם<sup>35</sup> in "repentance of God" passages in the historical books of the Old Testament.

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<sup>35</sup> In this section, every reference to the word נחם will indicate the Niphal Hebrew word נחם in the divine repentance passages.

Using the KJV as a baseline<sup>36</sup> in Appendix B, out of seventy-two translations of נחם in English Bibles from 1599 - 1950,<sup>37</sup> sixty-seven translate נחם as “repent.” In every case except for five, the translators’ choice for נחם maintained the KJV’s choice, the word “repent.” Four of the five deviations from “repent” are found in Ex 32:12 and Ex 32:14. For these two passages, GB (1599) translates נחם with the words “change his mind,” and DRA (1899) uses the word “appeased.” The final exception to KJV’s “repent” is found in DRA which chooses to translate Nu 23:19 as “be changed” rather than “repent.”

Although GB’s translations of Ex 32:12, 14 might portray a mutable God, the passage was viewed anthropopathically, and the words still follow the view of Calvin (1999:343), who interpreted it as appeasement. The translation of DRA is more directly in line with Calvin. The deviation from KJV in Nu 23:19 by DRA reflects a synonymous meaning with “repent,” as God will not repent or “be changed” by any outside circumstances.

	1599 – 1950 Pre – RSV	1953 – 2001 Post – RSV
Total “Repentance of God” passages	9	9
Total Bible versions surveyed	8	13
Total possible translations of “repent”	72	117
Total passages with deviations from “repent”	5	113
Percentage difference from “repent” (KJV)	7%	97%

After the Jewish Publication Society’s English translation in 1917, the next major English translation was the Revised Standard Version (RSV) in 1952. In this translation, in the nine<sup>38</sup> “repentance of God” passages in the historical text of the Old Testament, the word “repent” was retained seven times. The only change was in Ge 6:6-7 where the word “sorry” twice replaced “repent.” This reflects the first attempt to

<sup>36</sup> The KJV is a baseline in Appendices A and B. This choice was purely because the KJV translates all of the passages with the word “repent” or some derivative. The KJV superseded translations from the Reformation era, such as the Tyndale Translation and became the standard translation for almost four centuries, making it one of the most widely accepted versions in the English speaking world.

<sup>37</sup> The only translations that were considered in Appendix B were the actual English translations of the nine uses of the Hebrew word נחם in the “repentance of God” passages (Gn 6:6, 7; Ex 32:12, 14; 1Sa 15:11, 29, 35; Nu 23:19).

<sup>38</sup> It is accepted that there are actually more than nine “repentance of God” passages in the Old Testament, but this study is limited in scope to the nine passages under discussion.

interpret God's emotions as literal, removing the idea of anthropomorphic repentance.<sup>39</sup> Naturally, this allowed discussion about whether God is affected by earthly circumstances and human decisions.

Subsequent to the change that occurred in the RSV translation, English translations increased their changes in the wording for the translation of נחם. Looking at thirteen various English Bible versions<sup>40</sup> beginning with the Catholic New American Bible (NAB) translation produced in 1970 up to the Message (MSG) and English Standard Version (ESV) in 2001, out of the nine "repentance of God" passages, the Hebrew נחם is translated "repent" only four times. Prior to 1950, the Hebrew נחם was translated "repent" in 93% of its uses, but after the RSV translation in 1952, the same word is translated "repent" in just 3% of its uses. The anthropopathic concept had all but been abandoned. The point here is not to defend "repent" as an accurate translation, but rather to show that the anthropopathic "repent" was replaced by synonyms of "repent" that are more descriptive of specific feelings and emotions.<sup>41</sup>

Since 1952, in the "repentance of God" passages in the Old Testament historical texts, the Hebrew נחם began to be translated with different words, the favourite of which was that of sorrow or regret (52X), followed by a description of changing of mind (45X). The idea of relenting (10X) was a distant third choice and only used in Ex 32:12, 14 where the idea of God holding back punishment is in view.

The analysis in Appendix A shows the shift in the English translations of נחם by religious groupings (Jewish, Catholic, Protestant), as well as by translation methodology,<sup>42</sup> and also by date of translation. In every case, the pivotal point is the RSV translation in 1952. Every subsequent translation, regardless of its preferred

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<sup>39</sup> While "sorry" can also be used anthropopathically, the desire to change the word "repent" to "sorry" would indicate a move to a more literal rendering. If both were anthropopathic, then there really isn't a need to change the word.

<sup>40</sup> Although there are hundreds of English Bible translations, this study chose to use these few English translations as an illustration of the trend. See Appendix A for the compilation of the data. All of these Bible versions listed are subsequent to the RSV 1952 translation.

<sup>41</sup> This study reviewed English Bible translations that utilised both formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence in their translation methodology. It also included some translations that allow for paraphrasing. The intent was not to prove a specific theological intention for a particular translation, but rather to demonstrate an overall shift across the majority (if not all) English Bible translations.

<sup>42</sup>See Appendix A for a discussion on translation methodology.

translation methodology, shows that the use of נחם in these passages trends towards a God who reacts to circumstances.

In particular, the highly popular New International Version (NIV), which was first published in 1984 chose to emphasise grief (4X) and changing of mind (3X) in the nine passages. According to the publisher, Zondervan, the NIV is the most popular modern English Bible translation with over 215 million copies sold as of 2009 (Christian Business Association, 2009). The proliferation of Bible translations and paraphrase Bible versions which communicate God as “grieving,” “sorry,” and “changing his mind,” began in the 1970’s. The impact of the different translations is momentous, as the initiation and acceptance of Open Theism followed only a decade later. It cannot be stated that one event (change in English Bible translations using more “mutable” language) caused the other (Open Theism), but both of these shifts (along with Process Theology earlier) really reflect what is popular in current theology in its views of God.

How is it that a word from ancient Hebrew (נחם) that has been consistently translated “repent” for centuries is now translated with words that include concepts such as sorrow, regret, and changing of the mind? The answer is that there has been a shift in people’s view of God. In the same way that “control beliefs” (Cole, G., 2000:19) determined Calvin’s view of his understanding of נחם to be anthropomorphic, modern-day theologians and translators are using their control beliefs of a suffering and “genuine” god who does not know the future to determine new meanings for the Hebrew נחם in the “repentance of God” passages.

## **2.4 Impact: conclusion**

The debate over the impassibility / passibility of God had significant impact on the thoughts and perspectives of theology in the twentieth century. It has been shown that there has been significant movement in the areas of English Bible translations and English Bible commentaries – especially as they relate to the divine repentance passages in the historical texts. But, it is not an understanding of God’s impassibility or passibility that guides the interpretation in texts that indicate where God “repents.” Certainly the character of God (immutable, yet passable) can inform the interpretation, but it is not sufficient alone to drive the interpretation.

What follows must be a defined methodology involving a biblical-theological approach, as well as a detailed lexical and exegetical study. This multiplex approach will allow for a greater examination of the divine repentance passages, and their implications.

The lexical study of נָחַם (Chapter 4) as well as the exegetical analysis of key repentance passages (Chapter 5) will be informed by the debate about God's character and attributes in the present chapter as well as a specific biblical-theological approach (Chapter 3) that may serve as an intra Biblical "control belief" whereby the "divine repentance" passages can be approached.

## Chapter 3

# Grace within judgment—a consistent theme

As stated in the first chapter, this study adopts the methodology of Walter Kaiser, specifically in the area of the identification of a theme of the Old Testament. Most evangelical scholars hold to a particular theme or a multiplex of themes. While it is a valid argument that there are a number of themes running through the Old Testament, the biblical-theological premise of this study will follow a blend of the themes from Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton. This “blended theme” will be used to explore the nature of God’s **נחם** in chapters 4-5.<sup>43</sup>

The theme of “promise-plan” is that of Walter Kaiser (2008), which drives a theology of both Old and New Testaments. On the other hand, James Hamilton (2010) adopts a slightly different theme which is stated in his Biblical theology *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*. Both of these themes are related in that they relate to God’s “promise” of “salvation.” Where Kaiser falls short on the reality of judgment (promise is found within judgment), Hamilton highlights this aspect and shows that God’s grace is always found within his judgment. This study will “blend” these themes into the idea of “grace within judgment.” The idea of God’s grace is specified as being related to his promise in Ge 3:15. This theme will provide the exegetical boundaries with which to check lexical and syntactical conclusions.

Chapter 3 will briefly summarise the work of Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton relative to the idea of a theme or centre that runs throughout Scripture. It will also describe the methodology used in the study by describing a thematic approach as well as the lexical and syntactical approach to the problem.

### 3.1 Other exegetical approaches

Antecedent to the discussion about the use of a biblical-theological thematic approach in the task of exegesis is a survey of various other current exegetical approaches to understanding the passages that speak of God’s repentance (**נחם**).

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<sup>43</sup> Chapter 4 will be mostly limited to a survey of the recent lexical studies on the Hebrew **נחם**, and chapter 5 will focus on the exegesis of the specific “repentance of God” passages.

The repentance of God passages in four historical texts of the Old Testament (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; 1Sa 15:11, 29, 35; Nu 23:19) provide considerable difficulty in their interpretation. Not only is the idea of God's passibility in view in these texts, but also the passages appear to present a conflict with the doctrine of immutability. In his commentary on Genesis, Walton (2001:308-309) advances three possible approaches for understanding the Hebrew word נחם in Ge 6:6-7 where God is the subject and "repentance" is in view: (1) Adopt Open Theology and allow a God who does not know the future and is held hostage by the free-will decisions of his creatures; (2) the use of נחם with God as the subject is anthropomorphic and anthropopathic; and (3) reassess the lexical data remembering that lexical meaning is established by usage, not by lexicons. Adding to these, in recent years, a new concept of decree / announcement has also entered the discussion.

Keeping Walton's observations in mind, the following sections will provide a brief survey of the various approaches to interpreting and understanding the difficulty of the "repentance of God." The chapter will survey the anthropomorphic / anthropopathic approach (3.1.1), the approach of Process Theology, (3.1.2), the approach of a God who moves to protect Covenant faithfulness (3.1.3), the approach of a suffering God (3.1.4), the Open Theist approach (3.1.5), and finally the approach that makes a distinction between God's "decree" and "announcement" (3.1.6). The ensuing section (3.2) will describe the methodology adopted for the present study: the Old Testament theme of "grace within judgment." Section 3.3 will provide an overview of how this Old Testament theme is demonstrated through the Old Testament. Lexical data will be reassessed in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 will propose a separate solution for each repentance of God text and will endeavour to arrive at a specific meaning for the Hebrew נחם in each of the divine repentance texts that is both consistent with the nature of a fully immutable God and the rest of Scripture.

### **3.1.1 Anthropomorphism and anthropopathism**

The terms "anthropomorphism" and "anthropopathism" are distinct terms that are often used interchangeably (Caird, 1980:172). Whether one takes them as synonymous terms or unique, the outcome is the same.

### 3.1.1.1 The History of Anthropomorphism and Anthropopathism

By far, the greatest proportion of biblical language and expressions about God in the Old Testament are either anthropomorphic or anthropopathic, because outside of metaphor, there is no other language with which to speak about God (Caird, 1980: 174). Although there is little variety in Israel's use of this language between the different parts and periods of the Old Testament, this uniformity is significant because it implies that its usage has ancient roots (Korpel, 1990:627). While Israel shares anthropomorphic language with the gods of Ugarit and other pagan nations, there are stark differences in their uses. After detailing numerous contrasts and comparisons between the Ugaritic and Israelite descriptions of the Divine, Korpel (1990:635) demonstrates that all differences between the Ugaritic and Israelite anthropomorphisms can be traced back to the exclusivity of Israel's monotheism. To imagine God as anthropomorphic was just a way of speaking, but in no way was Israel copying the God-talk of the Ugarits, as the worship of the one almighty God created a massive wall of separation from its Canaanite environment (1990:628).

The anthropopathic interpretation of the "repentance of God" passages has been standard for orthodoxy at least since the Reformation until the early twentieth century. In general, for most commentators prior to the twentieth century, this is probably the most popular viewpoint on the repentance passages, and many would use the term anthropomorphism to describe both God's being and emotions.<sup>44</sup> Anthropomorphism was the common view, and minimised or eliminated the dilemma of a concrete picture of God; and protected God from being depicted as a blind natural force acting on impulse while at the same time approximating Him too closely to the human (Eichrodt, 1961:1:210-211).

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<sup>44</sup> Graham Cole (2000:25-27) states that "classical theism" necessitates anthropomorphism and anthropopathism to accommodate our "weak nature" in discussing the divine grief. Also see Walter Maier (2004:127-144) who provides a good survey of the orthodox position using anthropomorphism as a rebuttal against Open Theology. He quotes John Lange's (1902:288) commentary on Genesis where Lange speaks of the acceptance of anthropomorphism and anthropopathisms, "We will have in mind a total blank in respect to all those conceptions of God that most concern us as moral beings." In essence the view is that without this metaphor, there would be no understanding of God in the most important of circumstances, and they give life to the text. The majority of commentaries consulted in this study on the repentance passages adopt the anthropomorphic / anthropopathic view.

Some say that the God of the Bible is just as anthropomorphic as the Olympian pagan deities, having more in common with them than with Aristotle's "unmoved mover" (Cherbonnier, 1962:187). The influx of this philosophical thought is articulated by Eichrodt (1961:1:211), who says, "Nevertheless it is equally true that there is here a parallel to the manner in which paganism speaks of its personified natural forces. To hush up what there is in common with heathen ways of thought is merely to gloss over the facts, and to obscure the individuality of Israelite religious faith."

Pagan deities, such as the gods of Olympus, were not only represented anthropomorphically and anthropopathically, but also theriomorphically representing a deity in animal form (Yamauchi, 1967: 29-30). This was not only true of the Greek religions, but was even more prevalent in Canaanite and Egyptian religions. The God of Israel is never spoken of in this manner. Yamauchi (1967:31-43) demonstrates the wall of separation between pagan anthropomorphisms and Old Testament anthropomorphisms by detailing numerous examples in seven major distinctions that contrast the two.

1. Pagan anthropomorphisms readily exchange with theriomorphisms
2. Pagan anthropomorphisms developed a multiplicity of deities with distinctive spheres of influence
3. Pagan anthropomorphisms did not conceive of a God who was absolutely sovereign over all else
4. Pagan anthropomorphisms conceived of Gods that were kindred in origin to mankind
5. Pagan anthropomorphisms depicted Gods who were subject to the same passions as men
6. Pagan anthropomorphisms depicted Gods who were subject to the human needs of sustenance
7. Pagan anthropomorphic deities are as selfish, fickle, and even murderous in their relationship to mankind as men are to their fellowmen

Even though there is no connection between pagan and Old Testament anthropomorphisms, the meaning of Old Testament anthropomorphisms must still be ascertained. This is especially true since they are ever present in almost every page

of the Old Testament (Köhler, 1957:22-24).<sup>45</sup> It is widely understood that anthropomorphic representations of God are to be taken as metaphorical, however with anthropopathic statements the conclusion is not that clear.

In the first century A.D., the translators of the LXX tried to exclude anthropopathic conceptions from their translations (Fritsch, 1943:17). This was not due to Hellenistic influence, but rather developed separately within pre-Christian Judaism (see 2.1).

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, proponents of the documentarian hypothesis saw anthropomorphisms as more “primitive” than other expressions of the Deity. This brought them to identify the J strand in the Pentateuch with theophanies, the E strand’s (Elohim) self-revelation through dreams and visions, and the P strand’s avoidance of anthropomorphisms altogether (Yamauchi, 1968:218-221). However, recent scholarship has provided a sufficient and substantial critique of this argument,<sup>46</sup> and that the use of anthropomorphism within biblical language is hardly primitive.

In further support of this, Yamauchi (1968:220-222) describes the value of anthropomorphisms in making God accessible to man, and to do so in a less descriptive manner often led to pantheism or deism. What is especially insightful is his reference to the fact that the rejection of anthropomorphism by the early Greeks is now being repeated by modern day scholars: “It is ironic that the anti-anthropomorphic trend which began in Greece against the Homeric deities should have so influenced subsequent Western thought that modern critics have regarded the biblical anthropomorphisms as “primitive” and of less value than abstract descriptions of God.” (1968:220 cf. Korpel, 1990:87).

### **3.1.1.2 The hermeneutics of anthropomorphism and anthropathism**

The Old Testament is pervasive in its use of metaphorical language to describe the nature of God, and this forms much of the basis of Jewish and Christian theological

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<sup>45</sup> Köhler (1957:23-24) backs up this statement with copious references of God speaking (Ge 1:3), calling (Lev 1:1), hearing (Ex 16:12), seeing (Ge 1:4) and other actions, but also references to his having body parts (eyes Am 9:4; hands Am 9:2; fingers Dt 9:10; and feet Na 1:3), as well as feelings and passions (delight Jer 9:24; joy Zep 3:17; hatred Dt 12:31; jealousy (Ex 20:5).

<sup>46</sup> Yamauchi cites Ludwig Köhler, James Barr, Umberto Cassuto, M. H. Segal, and Moshe Greenberg as contemporary scholars who have written critiques against the belief that anthropomorphism is a “primitive” thought.

language. Marjo Korpel (1990:32) notes that “[t]he metaphorical nature of God-talk has recently been a subject of great interest among systematic theologians.” Since the Old Testament is clear about not acting on or venerating anthropomorphisms (Ex 20:4-6) and since Scripture is replete with anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions, the problem remains. What is the hermeneutic for interpreting anthropomorphism and anthropopathy? While both anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms make truth claims about God, anthropomorphisms are to be taken as metaphorical, idiomatic, or analogical due to clear boundaries given by Scripture. Anthropopathisms, however, sometimes may be taken as metaphorical, but are much less likely to be so (Snider 2007:103-116).

The distinction between anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms is primarily due to the clear teaching of Scripture that God is spirit and formless, which provides Scriptural boundaries for anthropomorphic language. Anthropopathisms, however, are not limited by clearly established scriptural boundaries for the interpretation of divine passibility language<sup>47</sup> (Snider, 2007:113).

The argument for a non-literal interpretation of anthropopathic language is derived from the understanding of the “otherness” of God, especially in categories used by Systematic Theology. Norman Geisler (2003:113-114) uses logical categories and inferences to argue that God cannot have changing emotions, is absolutely self-sufficient, and is in need of nothing. He goes on to state that God is also “completely unchanging in his being, will, and purpose.” In addition, since He is lacking nothing, God cannot have passion since “All passion is a desire for what is lacking.” Furthermore, passibility is impossible because “what is passible is under something: therefore God is not passible.” He also cannot be made to experience something new, which would make God subject to unrealized potentiality.<sup>48</sup>

However, Snider (2007:113) points out that Geisler’s argument is built on the false premise that God’s changing emotions somehow entail the fulfilment of a need or lack on God’s part. Unchanging in being, will, or purpose does not speak to emotions or

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<sup>47</sup> The main biblical passages defining these boundaries are Dt 4:12, 15, 16; Jn 1:18; 4:24; 1Ti 6:16.

<sup>48</sup> Geisler’s argument is summarised by Snider (2007:110-113) as containing five major doctrinal supports: God’s self-sufficiency, immutability, absolute perfection, sovereignty, and pure actuality.

passions. The passages that define immutability indicate that God's character and actions are consistent, thus they deal with actions and not emotions.

In dealing with anthropomorphisms, the understanding of the authorial use of metaphor is critical when God is described as having body parts such as eyes (2Ch 16:9), hands (Ex 13:3), or ears (Ps 86:1). This is key, because to believe that these are literal references that accurately depict God's literal body parts, is to be in direct conflict with how Scripture defines the essence of God (Ex 20:4; Dt 4:12; Jn 4:24). Anthropopathisms, however, present a different problem. God is love (1Jn 4:8), and unlike anthropomorphisms, there is no Scripture that defines God as impassible or apathetic ( $\alpha\text{-}\pi\acute{\alpha}\theta\omicron\varsigma$ ). Adding to the complexity are passages like Nu 23:19 and 1Sa 15:29 that define God as not having נחם yet Ge 6:6-7, Ex 32:12-14, and 1Sa 15:11, 35 all say that God did and does display נחם.

If נחם is anthropopathic, then how can it simultaneously describe something God does and does not do? Or, if נחם is anthropopathic, then what about חסד "lovingkindness," or אף "anger?" Are these real or literal attributes, or are they labels applied to mysteries? These questions leave real doubt not only about the true character of God, but also create questions about how we respond and communicate to God in a troubled world. Does God react to our circumstances or is He above those circumstances because He has ordained them? Is God feeling or is He cold and indifferent?

While it is true that at times anthropopathisms might be used metaphorically, this usage is not required by the boundaries of Scripture and should be approached with caution. There are a great many cases, such as God's grief,<sup>49</sup> where they should be taken at face value (Cole, G., 2000:23).

The anthropomorphic / anthropopathic approach has been the majority view since the days of John Calvin for those who hold to God's full immutability. With the advent of a "New Orthodoxy" in hermeneutics and an understanding of the character of God there is room for further study and exploration of the issue of what God is doing in the "repentance of God" passages. The present study will present a way forward that

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<sup>49</sup> This is Cole's interpretation, but the point is made — words of emotion should be translated literally.

seeks to provide a clear and compelling understanding of God's נחם in the repentance passage which harmonises with His full immutability.

### 3.1.2 Process theology

Process theology is a theology based on the work of Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) who developed the metaphysical process philosophy of Alfred Whitehead (1861-1947). Hartshorne assumed that nothing — not even God — is in an absolute state of being, but that everything is in a constant process of development and growth, and, therefore, relative. This view holds that all knowledge is dynamic and open-ended, and that God develops through his interaction with the changing world (Deist, 1987:135).

Marvin Davis (1983) pursued the question of an “unchangeable God” in his ThD thesis titled *An Investigation of the Concept of the Repentance of God in the Old Testament*. In his work Davis developed a solid lexical study of the Hebrew נחם and its synonyms to form a foundation, performed detailed exegetical analysis of key “repentance” texts, and then proceeded to develop process theology as a viable answer to the theological tension. What makes this study helpful is that Davis rejects the use of anthropomorphism or anthropopathism as a hermeneutical solution, and instead wrestles with the implications of the lexical meaning of נחם on the doctrine of God.

In this study, Davis (1983:67) accedes that how one translates נחם has a lot to do with one's interpretation of the concept of God's repentance. The conclusion is that the Old Testament language of God is not equivocal or univocal,<sup>50</sup> but rather is used analogically. In essence, God is like us, but also not like us. Therefore, God grieves and changes his mind – just like us, yet also in some way is not like us.

Although some of Davis' exegetical solutions results from redaction and dating,<sup>51</sup> he does a good job of dealing with the text in each of the “repentance of God” passages. The impact of the idea of Greek influence on the early church fathers, as well as the

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<sup>50</sup> Davis (1983:127-130) defines the equivocal use of language as meaning that words or concepts are used in a different way with God than with men. Univocal language is when words or concepts are used with different referents, they still carry an identical meaning.

<sup>51</sup> While his documentarian views do not affect his interpretation of Ge 6:6-7, he views the direct contradiction between 1Sa 15:11, 29, 35 as a result of the supposition of another author (Davis, 1983:58).

debate on God's impassibility is clearly evident. Since the definition of God's attributes were unduly influenced by Greek philosophers (Davis, 1983:151), it must be concluded that the doctrine of the immutability of God must be rejected (1983:155). In addition, because God is presented in the Old Testament as a personal being who is influenced by the temporal order, Davis rejects the idea of divine foreknowledge. He further supports his reasoning by concluding that while God is everlasting (meaning that He is without beginning and without end), the Bible does not support that there is a simultaneity of past, present, and future with God (1983:161).

The solution for Davis (1983:166-177) is process theology, and his approach to the solution is twofold: (1) Davis begins with the conclusion that God is not fully immutable, and thus able to be influenced by forces outside Himself, as well as the idea that God does not know the specifics of future events, and (2) that process theology seeks a doctrine of God that is compatible with an evolutionary view of the cosmos. The conclusion is that the attributes of God's immutability, timelessness, and impassibility are all called into question by the concept of God's repentance. The "repentance of God" passages are taken as the "more clear" passages which are used to shape the attributes of God. Because of this, the God of traditional theism must be rejected and replaced by the repenting God of process theology (1983:183).

### **3.1.3 Covenant faithfulness—a God of relationships**

The theme of repenting to maintain a covenant relationship was demonstrated by Harry Kuitert (1962) in his important dissertation on the anthropomorphousness of God. The Bible really speaks of man's theomorphic nature when he is described as being in the image of God, and nowhere indicates the use of anthropomorphism for God. Whenever Israel is speaking of God anthropomorphically, it is to express the symbiotic nature of a Covenant – God with his Covenant people, who each share the same history. The similarity between God and man is not one of essence or being, but rather one of a shared set of covenantal acts. Therefore, Kuitert does not see Israel's God as anthropomorphous, but rather as hebreomorphous (Kuitert, 1962:277).

The idea of a "living relationship" between Yahweh and Israel is further described by Kuitert (1972:53-56). God's desire to remain consistent drives him to occasionally repent to keep on being the Covenant-Partner God. The same is true for his non-repentance. When God does not repent (Nu 23:19), the motivation is the same as his

repentance even though the two outcomes are diametrically opposed. To repent of an action (such as flooding the earth or removing Saul as King over Israel) is to preserve covenant faithfulness. To not repent means Yahweh will not reject his covenant people. In other words, God's fluctuations through repentance actually preserve the consistency of his covenant faithfulness.

In 1975, Joachim Jeremias entered the discussion with *Die Reue Gottes*. In his book, Jeremias agrees with the idea of Philo's Platonic tendencies, and determines that God's repentance is truly a divine attribute found throughout the Old Testament as well as in early Rabbinical writings. To substantiate this, Jeremias (1997:15-16) relies on an erroneous etymological assumption<sup>52</sup> for the Hebrew Niphal נָחַם by associating the word with the Arabic *naḥama*. He sees that this repentance is not really a change of mind, but rather an emotional withdrawal of a planned line of action, which is judgment on his covenant people. It is God's compassion that drives his repentance, which results in a self-limitation through holding back a planned action (1997:16-27).

This self-limitation is seen primarily in two events: the global deluge (Ge 6-8) and Saul's rejection as king of Israel (1Sa 15). In both events, Yahweh's "painful sorrow" (*Reue*) accompanies Him taking back destruction (destruction of the world, removal of Israel's king). But, Jeremias (1997:36) also sees another parallel in both events in that their result is a situation that leads to a guarantee of continuation. Both stories leave a *einmaliges, unwiederholbares* (unique and unrepeatable) event. After the flood, humanity lives on without the threat of another worldwide deluge. After Saul's removal, Israel is given a more worthy king without fear of rejection.

Jeremias (1998:120) views God as immutable relative to salvation, but mutable relative to his penal justice. God plans to destroy, but "hopes" that He does not carry it out. The idea is one that Yahweh's salvation plan is primary, and that He will take any action necessary to preserve his covenant people, even if this mean holding back or even changing a planned action. The idea of escaping "from God" "to God" is posed by the question "Nur zu dem wandelbaren Gott kann man beten; er ist beeinflussbar, ja will beeinflusst werden, um seinen Willen "wandeln" zu können, d. h. gegen sich selbst helfend und rettend einzugreifen?" (Jeremias, 1998:123). Whatever He has

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<sup>52</sup> See Section 4.3.2.

said or threatened in the past, He will exhibit “self-limitation” by changing or revoking even his own righteous judgment in order to preserve his covenant faithfulness.

Nevertheless, the problem remains for those who hold to full immutability. While covenant faithfulness is an immutable attribute, Jeremias’ view leaves open the idea that God did not foresee the wicked actions of his covenant people.

This idea of a “self-limiting” god who will change to maintain his relationship with his people is also put forth by Jan-Dirk Döhling (2009), who describes God as “Der bewegliche Gott” (The Moving God). While agreeing with the perspective of Jeremias, Döhling (2009:529) asserts that repentance is actually an attribute of God that allows Him to exercise the necessary freedom to “retract” his penal justice on his people so that He will remain faithful to his covenant and his attribute of love. In essence, repentance is not a “turning from” and a “turning to,” but rather is a “freedom of movement” between two boundaries. “Als solche beschreibt sie: Gottes *Bewegung* zwischen den beiden in sich spannungsvollen und unaufgebbaren Eigenschaftspolen der Gerechtigkeit und Liebe.“ (Döhling, 2009:529).

The approach used by Döhling is similar to process theology, as suggested by the title of his chapter on Genesis 6:5-8 “Der lernende Gott – Die Reue Gottes in Gen 6, 5-8” (Döhling, 2009:85). The flood was a last resort against mankind, who had developed into total wickedness. God Himself actually was the real victim of the flood (2009:86), and God’s act of repentance was proof the flood was God’s last resort. Mankind never changed and they remained with calcified hearts. But, God’s repentance is actually a proof there was nothing else God could do (meaning no more judgment or discipline), as his righteous judgment was all that was left. True repentance (change) is the final act to preserve his people and maintain his love.

God “repents” in the form of self-reflection (Döhling, 2009:116), and his movement-act of repentance is seen in accepting the sacrifice of Ge 8:21. Noah is seen to contribute to the relationship (2009:123) and God’s movement has restored his relationship with mankind. Even though “Western Theology” might find this objectionable, religion is “historically and biblically wide” which allows for God to be influenced by Noah’s oblation (2009:498). The weakness of Döhling’s view, however, is that the flood waters abated long before a sacrifice was provided.

It is interesting that the idea of a “learning” God or “changing” God does not affect Döhling’s view of the constancy of God as defined by Scripture. He sees repentance (or non-repentance) not as a biblical fact or condition, but rather as a historical event (Döhling, 2009:488). When God is said to “repent,” the word is just describing the interplay between God and people, and more specifically God and Israel. God is busy moving and acting in a partner relationship (2009:506). This is why Döhling’s preferred rendering of 1Sa 15:11 can be, “Es reut mich. Ich habe ja Saul zum König gemacht. Er hat sich ja hinterrücks abgewandt von mir und meine Worte richtete er nicht auf.” (2009:202). By describing this phrase as a “word event formula,” Döhling (2009:201), sees this as God’s manifestation of Himself to Samuel, meaning a revelation that He moves to maintain the relationship. Stated more succinctly, “God must have freedom to change [move] in order to be consistent in his relationship with his partner.” Mutability, then, is God’s prerogative to use at any time to maintain his immutability.

### 3.1.4 A God who suffers

In addition to the concept of God’s ability to “repent,” the question of God’s suffering began to emerge as well. Using Acts 14:15, John Woolcombe (1967:129) saw that God is both “*autokinetos*” and “*toutokinetos*,” and since Paul calls God the “Living God,” because He is the Living God, He is also the God who suffers (Woolcombe, 1967:129). Coterminous with his study of God’s נחם, Kuyper (1969:259-261) also pursued the subject of the suffering of God. Because of his rejection of historical interpretations of the repentance passages due to their supposed pagan Greek influence, the interpretation of God’s נחם as a response to creation’s actions created an opening for questions about God’s goodness. How can God not repent or grieve when the world is suffering? The acceptance of the problem of God’s pain became a very real and accepted theology.

With discussion now turning once again<sup>53</sup> to the possibility of a suffering God, many theologians began to develop a consistent line of argumentation: “The concept of divine suffering is not only the core of our faith but the uniqueness of our Christianity.” (McWilliams, 1980:35). As the modernised world began to reflect on its continuous

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<sup>53</sup> This idea of a “suffering God” occurred with patripassianism and theopaschitism before the Middle Ages.

suffering, there arose an increasing desire to believe in a god who shares in that suffering as an answer to the dilemma of incomprehensible circumstances.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Jürgen Moltmann helped spearhead the Theology of Hope movement, with a contemporary focus on theodicy. Because of his idea of God as one who suffers over the tribulations of his creation, Moltmann created the perception that a true understanding of God would lead to the realisation that God suffers as we suffer (McWilliams, 1980:36-37).

Moltmann argues that a suffering God is actually a source of strength in our present struggle, and that our suffering will ultimately be transformed into a final joy. This does not diminish God's view on suffering, but rather intensifies it. "Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorable into the flesh of every unfulfilled present" (Moltmann, 1967:21). This leads to a passionate Christian life style, but with a "political hermeneutic" (McWilliams, 1980:38) that is bent toward liberation theology,<sup>54</sup> which leads Christians to oppose the apathy of contemporary Christian life (Moltmann, 1978:26) and actively oppose human oppression and injustice.

Although such a view encourages Christians to live out their faith relative to fighting injustice, it does so at the expense of defining God as one who is always against oppression. A brief look at history shows that this is not always the case with God. By grace, God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations, and the one whose lineage would beget the promised seed (Ge 3:15). In addition, God promised a land to Abraham, which would be an eternal possession, and ratified this promise with an eternal and unconditional covenant (Ge 15:6). The problem comes when in the midst of this covenant ceremony, God revealed to Abraham that his progeny would suffer under immense oppression and persecution for four hundred years (Ge 15:13). How can God "suffer with us" in his fight against oppression, while He Himself is the original source of oppression?

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<sup>54</sup> Liberation theology is defined as "An interpretation of theology from the view point of the politically and socially oppressed according to which God is by nature on the side of the oppressed .... and encourages them to liberate themselves from the oppressing powers in order to live as free human beings" (Deist, 1987:94).

Again, the problem remains. Who is God, and what kind of God is He when He watches us suffer? Is it his purpose to fight all oppression, and therefore, drive all of his followers to fight human oppression, or does He have another purpose?

The thinking of Moltmann has also been adopted by influential voices in South Africa. Adrio König (1982a:55) cogently wrote on the theology of comfort during the Apartheid era of South Africa addressing a neglected aspect of the gospel: the comfort which the gospel offers to people whose suffering is not alleviated. In speaking of the racial, economic, and political tension not only in South Africa, but in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, König challenged the basis of liberation theology, while simultaneously embracing its motives.

If one's thinking is not rooted in the biblical description of the character and nature of God, then one's conclusions and perspectives about God will change over time. In the same year he wrote *A Theology of Comfort*, König developed his thoughts on the notion of a Crucified God along the same lines as Moltmann in a book titled *The Idea of a Crucified God*. After giving a brief summation of the position of theopaschitism, König rejected the idea of God's impassibility, and described God suffering through an incarnated Christ. The ramifications of the idea that God is "emotionally affected" when we suffer began to manifest.

A reactionary god has a reactionary gospel. König (1982b:58) writes that because Israel was unfaithful, God found it "incomprehensible" and was amazed and astonished. He follows up this statement with the idea that since God cares, and suffers so much from our sin that He eventually reconciles us in Jesus rather than punish us and leave us to perdition. He defines this reactionary approach as the gospel (1982b:58) which then opens the door for a God who is not fully omniscient and immutable.

The problem with the idea of a changing and reactive God (who makes a backup plan when things go wrong) is that it results in a changing theology. This is shown through König's article *My Mind is Changing Continually, But ...* in which he catalogues his theological journey. The bulk of the article reflects Christ-centred concepts, yet the very end contains a statement of uncertainty: "I also find the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible in whatever form not merely very difficult, but utterly confusing" (König, 2001:26).

### 3.1.5 Open theism

The idea of a changing God led to the introduction of the term “Open Theism” in 1980, which was introduced by Richard Rice in his book, *The Openness of God*. The basic premise of Open Theism is that God is only partially sovereign over future events. Although the idea of God’s “repentance” found in the four historical texts discussed in this study are very important to the support of Open Theism, it must be stated that Open Theism is a theological movement that is dependent on far more than a few historical texts.

The underlying foundation for Open Theism is defined by Rice (1980:15) who says Open Theism “expresses two basic convictions: love is the most important quality we attribute to God, and love is more than care and commitment; it involves being sensitive and responsive as well.” The consequences of this are that “God’s will is not the ultimate explanation for everything that happens; human decisions and actions make an important contribution too.” (Rice, 1980:15-16).

Even though He has infinite knowledge of the past and present, God cannot know the future because He is waiting on our human decisions to determine the future. Before any exegetical spade turns up the biblical soil, Open Theism presupposes that God is the kind of God who would act in traditional repentance (Fretheim, 1988:59).

Ronald Goetz (1986:385-389) highlights Open Theism as the introduction and rise of what he calls a “New Orthodoxy” in the late twentieth century. In one example, he begins the discussion by labelling the theopaschite doctrine as a prior heresy that is now new orthodoxy.

In dealing with the difficult problem of theodicy,<sup>55</sup> philosophical presuppositions rather than exegetical arguments become evident, such as the belief that God truly understands us because He desires to share in our lot and suffer with us. But, since it is not satisfying that God “suffers” or “feels our pain,” Goetz (1986:389) proposes his own solution, which he says answers the required question that God must answer in the here and now before anyone can make sense of the eternal future.

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<sup>55</sup> Goetz (1986:388) defines theodicy in the form of a question: “If God is so powerful in creation and so willing ultimately to deify the creation, why is there now evil?”

*“God, the fellow sufferer, is inexcusable if all that he can do is suffer. But if God is ultimately redeemer, how dare he hold out on redemption here and now in the face of real evil? My own view is that the death of God’s Christ is in part God’s atonement to his creatures for evil. Only on the basis of God’s terrible willingness to accept responsibility for evil do we have grounds to trust God’s promises to redeem evil. Only in God’s daring willingness to risk all in the death of his own son can we have confidence that God finally has the power to redeem his promise.”*

The impact of this thinking had significant effect on biblical exegesis, and specifically on passages that deal with the repentance of God. Because divine repentance was considered a neglected subject, Terrence Fretheim (1988:47) focused on providing a convenient solution for this oversight: Open Theism. Using the exegesis of Open Theism to consider the matter of divine repentance, he affirms that the idea of “genuine interaction” must precede an understanding of the Old Testament texts on repentance (1988:63):

*To be affected and to interact genuinely does not mean some imperfection in God. In fact, it should be said that not to be able genuinely to respond or interact, not to be open and vulnerable, or refusing to change are in fact signs of imperfection.*

The idea that the future is locked up in prior prophesies creates a “straight-jacket for God, who can change to cut off a prophetic word altogether” (Fretheim, 1988:65). This leaves many questions in the areas of a completed canon and static divine revelation, but more importantly about the character of God, who binds Himself with prophecy so that his faithfulness can be trusted (Heb 6:17-18). If God’s flexibility in changing his mind due to circumstances and actions by his creation is to be considered more genuine and important than his faithfulness to prior promises, then the proverbial theological crossroads has been reached, and indeed orthodoxy has been redefined.

According to John Sanders (1998:282) there are four major tenets of Open Theism.

1. God desires “reciprocal relations” with his creatures.
2. God’s actions are contingent on the moral free will decisions of his creatures.
3. God does not exercise specific providence.

4. The freedom that God gives his creatures creates a certain degree of risk for God.

These presuppositions are also foundational to Terrence Fretheim's view that any canonical reference to God must incorporate all abstract speech about God. While the passibility of God is no peripheral matter,<sup>56</sup> Fretheim (1988:62) takes a philosophical rather than exegetical approach on his reading of Ge 6:6-7. He states that in considering the idea of God's repentance, one must avoid two extremes; that God is immutable in an absolute sense, and that God is mercurial and capricious. He places great emphasis on the perfection of God's intentions over and above his character.

Specifically, Fretheim (1988:62-66) lists five points for the reader's reflection in developing a correct understanding of these anthropopathic references (such as repentance) to God.

1. Divine self-limitation—God limits his options for activity in the world.
2. The primary attributes of God— these are defined as love and mercy.
3. A personal God—God is not detached, but rather is personally involved with his creation, and experiences vulnerability and openness to change.
4. A relationship of integrity—God does not act upon the world, but is affected by what is done by and to people. A dynamic and living relationship cannot be programmed in advance.
5. An open future—the future is genuinely open, and is not blocked out in advance. God does not have an unchangeable will in regard to every matter the prophets predicted.

While there is much to critique about these principles, it is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, three objections rooted in the Old Testament are discussed below:

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<sup>56</sup> A thorough discussion of God's passibility or impassibility is beyond the scope of this work. It is presupposed here that the nature of God includes passibility, and that God is not beyond feelings or emotions such as love and anger. There has been much written on the passibility of God in the twentieth century. For a thorough discussion of the topic, see Andy Snider's dissertation *Divine Impassibility: Finding the Biblical Center* (Snider, 2007:1-297).

- First, the emphasis of the primacy of the love of God over every other attribute (such as holiness) limits the extent of God's attributes. On this point, it can be seen that Scripture shows that God's compassion (feeling) is balanced by His righteousness (objective immutability), and that one is not prominent over the other in Ex 34:6-7:

**Exodus 34:6-7**

<sup>6</sup>Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; <sup>7</sup> who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

In answer to the request by Moses that Yahweh reveal Himself to Moses, Yahweh does not proclaim his רַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת "abundant lovingkindness and truth" first. Instead, the structure of the proclamation is given not only by this appositive noun clause, but also by three substantive participles. The first substantive participle is נֹצֵר, translated "preserving," or "a watcher, a preserver" and defines God as a preserver of חֶסֶד "lovingkindness" for "thousands." The second participle is נוֹשֵׂא, translated "forgiver," which defines God as a forgiver of iniquity, rebellion, and sin. If God's answer to Moses stopped here, then Fretheim and Open Theology's idea of the primacy of God's love would begin to find traction.

Verse 7, however, continues with an emphatic infinitive absolute in the Piel of the verb נָקָה, translated "to make free, to clear," which when stated with the negative would be "by no means clearing" or "will utterly not clear." This last clause begins with a simple adversative waw conjunction explaining the other half of God's forgiveness. He will forgive, but will "by no means" or will never clear the guilty. The guilty are assumed to be the people described as full of עֲוֹן "iniquity," פְּשָׁע "rebellion," and חַטָּאת "sin." While God forgives, He will "by no means" clear or forgive those who are guilty.

In fact, God explicates his statement of forgiveness by describing his passion for judgment with another substantive participle פֹּקֵד which has a conjunctive munach connecting it with its object emphasising that He will visit and/or punish

the iniquity עֲוֹן (also translated guilt) of the fathers, their sons, and their grandchildren extending to the third and fourth generations. Certainly judgment and holiness are attributes that are equally as important to God's character as mercy and lovingkindness because the guilty (עֲוֹן) receive both grace and judgment.<sup>57</sup> Both of these attributes define the character of God.

The primary assumption made by Fretheim and the Open Theists is that it is purely a relational desire or emotion that evokes a change in God, thus deeming it impossible for Him to be immutable. Ex 34:6-7 reveals a different picture. God is equally passionate about both judgment and grace.

- Secondly, Open Theism claims that God desires for us to demonstrate our love to Him in an unconditional manner, which crosses paths with those who hold to immutability. The charge made by Open Theism is that “authentic” love has integrity only when that love is not programmed or coerced (Fretheim, 1988:64). This love is meant to preserve humanity's freedom of choice to obey, and this is accomplished by insuring that all of God's acts toward those purposes are not predetermined (Raney, 2003:114). In this sense, God is self-limiting in what He can say or do, because in a relationship of integrity neither party can be overwhelmed. This “truth” is what qualifies divine control, sovereignty, and omniscience (Fretheim, 1984:34-37)

God does not expect love to be demonstrated before He will bring his love, and his actions are not influenced by the love of His people as shown in Dt 7:7-8:

**Deuteronomy 7:7-8**

"The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,<sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

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<sup>57</sup> This is not to say that each person in the group comprising “the guilty” receive grace and judgment at the same time, but rather that some out of “the guilty” receive grace, while the others receive judgment. The point is that both God's judgment and grace are displayed through “the guilty.”

The same is true for God's immutable choosing of Abram. God chose Abram (described in Ne 9:7) as well as Israel, David, etc., unconditionally, and also at a time before they showed any love toward God.

**Nehemiah 9:7**

"Thou art the LORD God, Who chose Abram And brought him out from Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name Abraham.

The New Testament also attests to this same truth, and affirms in Ro 5:8:

**Romans 5:8**

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

It is God Himself who is demonstrating love, and that to sinners. Ro 5:10 goes on to add emphasis to the point:

**Romans 5:10**

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Mankind is not only entirely permeated with sin (Ro 5:8) and found to be an enemy of God (Rom 5:10), but he is also proclaimed to be dead spiritually (Eph 2:5) and spiritually dead people cannot love. At least, they cannot love with a love that satisfies God. But again, in these passages we see that it is God's love that unconditionally reached the dead, the enemy, the sinner first. In this way, it is clear that any love that we have for God is not only prompted by God; it is predetermined.

- Finally, the third objection concerns Open Theism's assumptions is the idea that there is an open future, and that God does not know the future completely, which denudes God's eternity, omniscience, and sovereignty. The foundation of this paradigm is their view of the authenticity of God's relationship with mankind: the world is not only dependent on God, but God is also dependent on the world, and is continually affected by the world. He is sovereign, but only with qualification, and that qualification is the "considerable power and freedom" given to his creatures. A serious relationship has no merit or integrity unless there is a limitation of freedom, and a sharing of power (Fretheim, 1984:36-37).

Trevor Craigen's (2001:168) discussion from Isa 40-48 shows the opposition of Scripture to this particular premise of Open Theism, and provides "Two literary strategies in proclaiming God that theologically block any attempt to limit his power and knowledge deliberately." These strategies are defined as (1) a series of rhetorical questions and (2) declarations on the certainty of divine purpose.<sup>58</sup> While there are many passages to investigate, Craigen demonstrates that Isa 46:10 provides a significant problem to Open Theology, specifically in the area of his omniscience and foreknowledge.

**Isaiah 46:10**

Declaring the end from the beginning  
And from ancient times things  
which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established,  
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

God guarantees his predictive prophecy, and specifically prophecy about the coming Messiah, by giving credible evidence to support his attribute of eternity and omniscience. He names a future king, Cyrus, the Persian king who will be instrumental in overthrowing the Babylonians and allowing the exiles back into the land of Israel. Open Theists maintain a strong assertion of God's partial omniscience,<sup>59</sup> even though there is a plethora of hermeneutical problems with the balance of Scripture. Nevertheless, this really poses no problem for the Open Theists, because of their commitment to presuppositions which constrain and direct their exegesis. In fact, their foundational premise that future free decisions do not exist before they are made (Rice, 1980:43) runs straight into the wall of Isa 46:10. Thus, there is a significant hermeneutical conflict between the Open Theists and those who hold to the immutability of Classical Theism.

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<sup>58</sup> The entire Master's Seminary Journal for the Fall of 2001 is focused on addressing the questions and serious difficulties and faults of Open Theology. In addition, see Ware (2000), and Snider (2007:63-70). Craigen's article was singled out because of the focus on divine limitation and an unknown future and its problems with the prophet Isaiah. This article provides a very clear and most direct refutation of this particular point of an "open" future with God.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Thomas (2001:180-190) covers this issue of Open Theism in his article titled *The Hermeneutics of Open Theism*. One of the main errors of Open Theism is the use of "hermeneutical hopscotch," which involves selecting only passages that support a predetermined opinion, which allows the interpreter to arrive at any conclusion that is desired.

Snider (2007:69) explains that Fretheim's paradigm, which is committed to the fact that "the faithful covenant Maker suffers at the hands of his covenant partners because of the libertarian free will that he has granted them, and his ability to respond is limited by this," is the foundational premise for Open Theism. Clear passages such as Isa 46:10 are interpreted through the "more clear" lens of the understanding of the free will that libertarians believe God gave to all mankind.<sup>60</sup>

With this commitment firmly established, in Ge 6 God is seen as regretting his past act of creation because of his evaluation of the human situation (v. 5). In his commentary on Ge 6:6-7, Fretheim (1994:389) can see God's "divine consternation and disappointment, since God's vision for what the world might have been has been dashed by a narrow and self-centred human vision." The focus is on God's broken heart, and his desire to create a new possible future with Noah (undoubtedly waiting for Noah's future choices to become manifest), again shows that God is a risk-taker of the highest sort who gambles on a humanity that has no chance for success (Ge 6:5; cf., 8:21).

In Ex 32:12-14, Fretheim (1991:283-285) says God recognizes Moses' total autonomy and freedom to make a decision whether to accept God's condemnation of Israel. God has entered into a genuine relationship with Moses so that his dialogue is welcomed, and that God is not the only one who has something important to say. This dialogue brought a reversal or change in direction from God, because He considered Moses' recommendations as an important ingredient in fashioning the future. Fretheim's (1991:286-287) conclusion is simple and clear: "The God of Israel is revealed as one who is open to change." Brueggemann (1994:932), while not necessarily in agreement with this, resonates with Fretheim when he says, "Such freedom on God's part is, of course, a problem for scholastic theology, which wants an

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<sup>60</sup> The issue of a "free will" is not a simple issue. In his thesis, Snider is referring to the objection that after the fall, man still has a free will both to sin and not to sin. This error is driven by a dismissing, or at least discounting the doctrine of depravity and its effects on the human will. Those who are redeemed still live in this world, but with a renewed mind are able to have a renewed will that allows them the freedom to choose not to sin.

immutable God, but such a God stands in deep tension with the biblical presentation of God.”

In summary, Open Theism has many parallels with Process Theology, in that God’s immutability is now not sacrosanct. God changes as we live and make choices. He is immutable with regard to his character, but He is free to change and “learn” from his prior decisions as they worked themselves out with his creation.

With the objections to Open Theism clearly stated, the Open Theist view that the lexical meaning for  $\text{נָחַם}$  is “sorry,” “regret,” or even “change his mind” in a reactive sense is not an acceptable view for those who hold to God’s immutability. It is not the passibility of God that raises the objection, but the mutability of God. In this view, God is totally affected and dependent on his creation, and cannot know the future. However big or small, everything is probable, and at risk.

### **3.1.6 The approach of divine decree**

A more recent view, championed by Robert Chisholm (1995:387-399) is that God’s ability to change his mind is based on whether He is speaking through a divine decree or an announcement. While this view sounds like a derivative of the Open Theist view,<sup>61</sup> it stands clearly in the camp of immutability.

Unlike the Open Theists, who have opened the door to a “new hermeneutic” and a “new orthodoxy”, Chisholm attempts to exclude philosophy and focus on lexical and syntactical study. Using van Dyke Parunak’s (1975:512-532) six-fold division of the semantic senses of  $\text{נָחַם}$  as a foundation, and combining them into four categories, Chisholm proceeds to differentiate between (1) marked or formal decrees, (2) unmarked or informal decrees, (3) marked or explicitly conditional statements of intention, and (4) unmarked or implicitly conditional statements of intention. Basically, on the question of God changing his mind (questioning immutability), the answer is, “it depends.” (Chisholm, 1995:387, 399).

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<sup>61</sup> In his article titled *The Impossibility of God of the Possible*, Richard Mayhue notes that the article by Robert Chisholm is mistakenly listed as “pro-Openness.” (Mayhue, 2001:205n9). Robert Chisholm is a sound supporter of the doctrine of immutability, and maintains the traditional definitions of sovereignty and omniscience.

Grammatically, Chisholm maintains that a decree contains the waw + imperative + waw + cohortative, and the announcement comprises a imperative + jussive + cohortative sequence (Chisholm, 1995:390-396).

In his article on Ex 32:12-14 on whether prayer changes God, Barrick (2001:160) points out three critiques of Chisholm's conclusions:

- The first critique is simply that this syntactical distinction is not sufficiently diverse or exegetically distinct.
- Secondly, Barrick points out that Chisholm misses the context that ties Moses' prayer to the Abrahamic Covenant (Ex 32:10; cf., Ge 12:2) along with the fact that God's judgment was still poured out on the people for their rebellion (vv. 34-35).
- Finally, in a theological criticism, Barrick notes that Chisholm's statement, "In every case where such a change is envisioned or reported, *God had not yet decreed a course of action or an outcome*," (Chisolm, 1995:399; emphasis Barrick) is flawed in its consistency with the contents of the passage. Barrick (2001:160) points out that there is a decree in v. 10 up to the *athnach* in the Hebrew and that the last half of the verse is inconsistent with what God had decreed regarding the twelve tribes of Israel in Ge 49.

With the thrust of the argument somewhat deflated, the attraction of Chisholm's view of "decree vs. announcement" diminishes. Too much focus is placed on the circumstances, which are viewed outside of the purview of God's sovereignty and providence. As circumstances change, then God must also have changed his mind (Chisholm, 1995:396). One problem with this approach is its assumption that current circumstances are absolute, and any change in direction is assumed to be a change in God, as if it is known that God's plan is always to maintain the *status quo*. Like the Open Theists, Chisholm has begun with an understanding of the whole without reviewing the details first.

Relying on one's personal evaluation of current or future circumstances can be subjective when ascribing motives and particular outcomes to the sovereign will of the everlasting God. A brief look through the books of 1-2Sa and 1-2Ki shows that circumstances and outcomes can be very perplexing to understand. The Divine Decree Approach tries to maintain the orthodoxy of immutability while allowing for

some type of defined “changeability” with God. To do so, however, is to presuppose an extrapolation of circumstances to some defined point in the future (like a desired continuation of the human race in its sinful condition, or that continued blessing is a desire for God to return humans back to the Garden of Eden) as an understandable and fixed truth. The subjectivity lies in ascribing exegetical certainty to a given set of current or future circumstances.

### **3.2 A biblical-theological approach to the Old Testament**

The debate on God’s impassibility during the twentieth century drew a sharp focus on the divine repentance passages. This focus resulted in much lexical work on the Hebrew word **נחם** as well as discussion on anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms. Since the beginning of the debate, the majority of scholars surveyed have sided with God’s passibility, and with the advent of Open Theism and Process Theology, there is now a strong voice advocated for God’s partial immutability.

The question for those who advocate God’s full immutability while holding to his passibility now stands out: If God’s immutability was protected by His impassibility, and his impassibility was protected by the use of anthropopathism in the divine repentance passages, how is one to take these passages if it is determined that God is passible in that He does experience emotions and feelings? Is there an exegetical solution for the theologian who holds to God’s passibility as well as His full immutability?

The answer to this question potentially lies in the area of biblical theology. Specifically, the present thesis will seek to apply the historical-grammatical methodology of Walter Kaiser through the grid of a thematic approach to the Old Testament, which is advocated both by Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton.

Although the Old Testament does not necessarily provide a clear and comprehensive statement of coherency (Brueggemann, 1997:117), a biblical theologian must still be committed to interpret the Bible as a coherent whole because it is the word of an inherently coherent God (House, 2002:270). One of the approaches to this commitment to coherence is the pursuit of a theme or centre of the Old Testament.

Hasel (1985:37; 1991:139-171)<sup>62</sup> notes that during the twentieth century this commitment was demonstrated by an “unprecedented impetus” given to the pursuit of a logical theme or centre of the Old Testament.

The vigorous pursuit described by Hasel was certainly not a pursuit that led to a unified decision. In his article on issues in Old Testament theology, Hasel (1985:37-38) notes that Eichrodt’s revolutionary approach to an Old Testament centre which evolved to the biblical concept of “covenant” was shared by G. E. Wright, F. C. Prussner, and F. C. Fensham. This idea was met with strong opposition from theologians such as G. von Rad, H. Gese, A. H. J. Gunneweg, and C. Westermann. Each of these denied that the Old Testament actually even contained a centre. Within this frame of reference, Barr discussed a “plurality” of centres, which opened up different ways to organize the Old Testament.

In addition to covenant, there were many others who advocated for their own different biblical centre of the Old Testament.<sup>63</sup>

Holiness of God	J. Hänel, E. Selin
Lordship of God	E. Köhler
Sovereignty of God	J. Heller
Kingdom of God	B. Hessler, G. Klein
Rulership of God	H. Seebass
Communion	Th.C. Vriezen
Election	R. C. Dentan, H. Wildberger
The Name of Yahweh	W. Zimmerli
The Presence of God	S. Terrien
The Design of God	E. Martens
Election of Israel	H. D. Preuss
The Steadfast Love of God	Spieckermann
Israel the people of Yahweh	R. Smend
Dominion	E. Merrill
Promise Plan	W. Kaiser

In reviewing a summary of proposed centres, Hasel (1972:168) writes, “It is highly significant that virtually all proposals for a centre have God or an aspect of God and/or his activity for the world and humankind as a common denominator. This points

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<sup>62</sup> While Hasel portrays the concept of a biblical theme in the OT as gaining popularity in the twentieth century, it should be noted that Hasel’s preference is a cross-section approach to the Old Testament that relies on multiple themes.

<sup>63</sup> This partial list was developed from Hasel (1985:37-38; 1991:139-171) and Hamilton (2006:65-67) in their discussions of the development of an Old Testament centre in the twentieth century.

inadvertently to the fact that the Old Testament is *Theocentric*, as the New Testament is *Christocentric*. In short, God / Yahweh is the dynamic, unifying centre of the Old Testament.”

With so many nuanced approaches to a centre of the Old Testament by so many scholars, not to mention those who are against such an approach, it is impossible to systematically or exegetically prove that one is *the* centre. Although James Barr (1999:295) holds that the idea of a theological “centre” is regarded with skepticism and an easy target for mockery, he does state that it really is a kind of hypothesis formation. In fact, he does agree that the “centre” of the Old Testament is not explicitly put forward by the text, and so requires a centre to be proposed or suggested. If various proposals are unsatisfactory, then one can propose another (Barr, 1999:340).

The present thesis will apply the thematic approaches of two scholars; Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton. Both of these approaches will be described and their reasoning applied to the proposed theme of “grace within judgment.”

### **3.2.1 The thematic approach of Walter Kaiser**

In his 1978 monograph on Old Testament Theology, Walter Kaiser developed an inductively derived theme found in the Old Testament. Kaiser focuses on using an exegetical methodology that derives the theme of the Old Testament from the text itself (Kaiser, 1978a:33). According to Kaiser, this textual derivation must occur inductively, and it must be shown that it is not only the starting point of the canon, but also its veracity is attested through the continuous testimony revealed throughout the corpus of Old Testament texts.

Some contemporaries remarked that Kaiser’s methodology is one-sided and unhistorical, which will offset any relevant insights to the Old Testament (Saebø, 1980:445), while others praised his methodology and definition of Biblical Theology as “solid” (VanGemeren, 1980:431). Kaiser employs a diachronic methodology, yet is antithetical to a reconstruction of Israel’s history derived from historical-critical hypothesis (Merrill, 2006:16).

Consistent with Brevard Childs’s canonical approach to the Old Testament, Kaiser has a keen awareness of the need for unity between the Old and New Testaments, but is equally concerned that New Testament revelation not be read back into the Old

resulting in spiritualising, moralising, or allegorising the text. In his theology, Kaiser makes the case for a biblical centre of the Old Testament using a single-theme approach. According to Kaiser, this centre is God's record of "promise" or "promise-plan." He was the first to use the idea of "blessing-promise" as an organising principle (Hasel, 1991:53).

Paul House (1998:41) regards Kaiser's single "messianic"<sup>64</sup> theme to be quite convincing, comparing it to J. Barton Payne's theme of redemption. However House points to the difficulty that both works share: a lack of breadth in covering Old Testament theology. He goes on to note, "No doubt this difficulty is part of the reason for the 'toward' in Kaiser's title" (House, 1998:41).

In his updated Old Testament Theology, Kaiser (2008:19) follows the ideas of Willis J. Beecher (1975:242) in the 1905 Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary, and his definition of God's promise.

*God gave a promise to Abraham, and through him to mankind; a promise eternally fulfilled and fulfilling in the history of Israel; and chiefly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, he being that which is principal in the history of Israel.*

Kaiser develops his own promise plan of God this way:

*The promise-plan is God's word of declaration, beginning with Eve and continuing on through history, especially in the patriarchs and the Davidic line, that God would continually be in his person and do in his deeds and works (in and through Israel, and later the church) his redemptive plan as his means of keeping that promised word alive for Israel, and thereby for all who subsequently believed. All in that promised seed were called to act as a light for all the nations so that all the families of the earth might come to faith and to new life in the Messiah.*

To help portray the pervasiveness of this unifying centre, and specifically its unity with the New Testament, Kaiser gives ten distinctive characteristics (Kaiser, 2008:19-25):

1. The doctrine of the Promised Messiah is found throughout all the Scriptures and not just in isolated or selected passages.

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<sup>64</sup> This is House's term as he describes Kaiser's "promise-plan."

2. The Old Testament Messianic teaching was regarded as the development of a single promise (Gr. *Epangelia*), repeated and unfolded through the centuries with numerous specifications and in multiple forms but always with the same essential core.
3. The New Testament writers equate this single, definite promise with the one made to Abraham when God called him from Ur of the Chaldeans.
4. While the New Testament writers occasionally speak of promises, using the plural form of the word, the manner in which they do so does not weaken the case for a single definite promise in the Scriptures.
5. The New Testament writers regard this single, definite promise, composed of many specifications, to be the theme of both the Old and New Testaments.
6. The promise made to Abraham is represented as both being partially fulfilled in the events of the Exodus and yet still to be fully fulfilled in the distant future.
7. The New Testament writers not only declare that the promise-plan of God is seen through the whole Old Testament, but they adopt the Old Testament phraseology as part of their own way of expressing God's revelation to them.
8. The New Testament writers teach that the promise of God is operating eternally and is irrevocable.
9. The New Testament writers make a strong connection between the promise and a number of other doctrines.
10. The culmination of all the specifications (i.e., the individual predicted doctrines that support the one unifying promise-plan) are wrapped up in the one promise doctrine, or promise-plan, which focuses on Jesus Christ.

Analogous to Eugene Merrill, Kaiser (1978a:33) sees the earliest expression of this promise in the creation account in Ge 1 where God gives a blessing to the fish and fowl (v. 22) and then to mankind (v. 26). He equates the idea of "blessing" (first through the Hebrew verb בָּרַךְ where God "blesses" the fish and fowl in v. 22) to the "promise"

and asserts that the unifying promise is revealed in a multiplicity of lexemes.<sup>65</sup> Unlike Merrill, however, he rejects the idea of “dominion-having” as the central content of the promise (covenant), and does not include the idea of the commands to rule and subdue that are found in Ge 1:26-28. For Kaiser, “blessing” is like the starter’s pistol that initiates the unfolding of the ultimate plan of God, and he sees v. 28 as prophetically foreshadowing the divine blessing through the mediation of Abraham.

The biblical text begins with the spoken word of God (Ge 1:3). Building on that, the first chapter of Genesis contains a repeated emphasis of the spoken word of a personal God, moving from the speaking of creation to the speaking of blessing. God blessed the creatures of the sea and air (v. 22), followed by his special blessing to mankind that carried one additional amplification; they were to be God’s personal image bearers. The result of this blessing is rule and domination of creation by man. Man (Adam and subsequently his wife, Eve) was God’s appointed steward over his creation, and was to act as vice-regent over all inanimate and animate matter.

Before the culmination of the creative process, God also pronounced a blessing on the Sabbath, ending with the statement that everything was “very good.” By proffering the term “untested goodness” (Kaiser, 2008:41) and indicating that the account in Ge 3 was to test humanity’s obedience and free will, Kaiser opens the door (albeit very slightly) to the idea that judgment is also in view along with blessing.

The first word of promise, however, is rightly found in Ge 3:15 with the introduction of rebellion to God’s goodness:

**Genesis 3:15**

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Even though this is a passage of judgment, the blessing continues through the population growth and innovation in Ge 4. This blessing (although somewhat less than the original blessings given in Ge 1) of productivity was interrupted by the cataclysmic castigation of wrath because of a parallel growth of evil that had

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<sup>65</sup> Kaiser refers to the works of Foster R. McCurley, Jr. (1970:401-410) and Gene Tucker (1965:487-503) whose lexicographical work demonstrate the variety of expression used for the idea of “promise.” McCurley identifies the Hebrew דָּבַר “to speak” as referring to “promise” in over thirty instances, and Tucker shows how the words “pledge” and “oath” also share the antecedent “promise.”

overwhelmed the planet (Ge 6:5). Against the backdrop of “exasperation” and implementing a recovery plan (Kaiser, 2008:44-45), God facilitated the perpetuation of his promise by working through Noah and his family. This second word of blessing (being fruitful and multiplying) was repeated to Noah and his family, and was also given to all living creatures on the earth (Ge 8:17; 9:1, 7) as well as a promise to all nature (8:22).

The catastrophic event of the flood also precipitated the first use of the Hebrew word **בְּרִית** “covenant”<sup>66</sup> by which God promised to forever refrain from judgment through a flood. This is the first act of self-restraint, and is made through a promise covenant. What is interesting to note is that this act of grace (self-restraint) was given without any change in the original problem — that man was continually wicked and that the thoughts of his heart were evil continually. When Noah and his family left the ark and sacrificed to God, it was still clear that the thoughts of all mankind (Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives) were evil by nature “from their youth.”

At the end of the flood account, with Noah and his family having just avoided extinction, there is a second word of promise (blessing). Kaiser (2008:46) describes the three-part heptastich in Ge 9:25-27 as a word of “judgment and salvation.” While a thorough interpretation of this difficult text is beyond the scope of this work, it is important to point out that Shem is the main beneficiary who receives a special blessing compared to his brothers or his nephew Canaan. Shem and his progeny are the focal point of blessing in the subsequent chapters, highlighting a special blessing against a backdrop of inclusionary blessing given to Japheth and the actual cursing of Canaan.

God’s “dwelling” in the tents of Shem (Ge 9:27) foreshadows the “Shekinah” glory of God that resided with Israel until the Babylonian captivity. Here Kaiser raises the expected question of Shem being the designated line for the promised seed in Ge 3:15. The content of the first word of promise had expanded from the non-descriptive “seed” to the line of a particular family—the family of Shem.

The third word of promise is found in the narrative of Ge 11:1-12:4. Like the first two words of promise, this account is also laid against the backdrop of rebellion and disaster. While the original blessing of God to fill the earth was being accomplished through the proliferation of the families and nations listed in Ge 10, the people were

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<sup>66</sup> See Ge 6:18; 9:9, 11-13, 15-17.

bent on following the evil intentions of their hearts. They tried to organise around a common structure and a common purpose; to build a strong city with a tower to reach to heaven, and to make a name for themselves. They were the masters of their universe, rather than understanding their real position as vice-regent image-bearers who were stewards of God's universe.

In this third word of promise, Kaiser (2008:47) again alludes to a dual picture of judgment-grace. He states, "The judgment of God came in the double form of confounding of their speech and the scattering of the peoples over the earth. But again *the sin-curse theme was closely matched with a divine grace-blessing theme.*" (emphasis added). The word of promise is inexplicable without a backdrop of judgment.

God did not permit the nations to go the way of destruction. Their false unity would surely have resulted in total carnage as everyone began to battle for supremacy. By dividing their languages, God created a sense of confusion (judgment) along with a sense of balance (there can be no unification around evil) where nations will now keep each other in check. At the same time, as they desired to make a name "for themselves" (Ge 11:4), through the line of Shem leading to Abram, God graciously chose a man to provide further revelation about his promise.

In Ge 12:1-3, the word "blessing" or "bless" occurs five times. Abram will be personally blessed; he will be a personal blessing to many others; those who bless him will also be blessed by God; and ultimately, all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abram himself. Where the first explanation of the promise only pictured a victorious seed, and the second defined that seed as coming from the line of Shem, this third word of promise provided some results of that future seed. There were to be tangible benefits: the greatness of a nation, a name, personal benefit, and relationship.

The emphasis is on the singular promise rather than a scattering of prophecies. It is being continually fulfilled while still awaiting a climactic consummation through the Servant of the Lord. The use of Old Testament phraseology by the New Testament writers demonstrates this continuation of an expected completion of the promise spoken first in Ge 3:15.

The writers of the New Testament did not just pull terminology from the extant Hebrew manuscripts, but appealed to a single tradition that had been carried through and was still waiting for fulfilment. The New Testament is meaningless without any references to a promised seed, people of God, kingdom of God, Day of the Lord, etc. These inspired authors saw the promise as a compelling force in history, as they heard Jesus continually say, “The Messiah *must* suffer and die and rise again.” This is also seen in how the Apostles referred to the “predetermined” plan of God in the book of Acts.

The unified plan of God is central to all of Scripture. The course of history weaves in and around this plan, always progressing toward its final realisation. The final step in the promise-plan of God is the final defeat of Satan and death (1Co 15:25-28; Rev 20:10-15). This is coterminous with the final and ultimate blessing of the new heavens and new earth, which provides the full inheritance and full rewards to all the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:29) including continuous and eternal fellowship with God.

While the present study agrees with the methodology of defining an Old Testament centre, it does see merit in some criticisms of Kaiser’s conclusion about the centre being “promise” or “promise-plan.”<sup>67</sup> This study holds that there is an additional element which should be more prominent in the theme, which is judgement. Kaiser (2008:47) subsumes the idea of judgment along with promise when he says:

*The theological factors found in each crisis, which perpetrated the judgment of God, were the thoughts, imaginations, and plans of an evil heart (Ge 3:5-6; 6:5; 8:21; 9:22; 11:4). But God’s salvific word was equal to every default of earth’s mortals. Alongside the sin-judgment themes came a new word about a “seed” (3:15), a race among whom God would personally take up his residence and “dwell” (9:27), and the blessing of what Paul would later call the “good news” of the gospel (Gal. 3:8) offered to every nation on the face of the earth (12:3)” (italics added).*

Without sin-judgment, there is no promise. The word εὐαγγέλιον means “good news.” But, there is no good news without bad news. There is no salvation and redemption without wrath and bondage. In the same way that tin and lead meld together when heated to a specific temperature to form solder, the two elements of sin-judgment and

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<sup>67</sup> Rogier (2010:132) comments that a “promise-plan” is an inadequate unifying theme for handling all the individual books, and that “it also fails to incorporate issues like the judgment passages or God’s pursuit of his glory in non-redemptive ways.” VanGemeren (1980:432) rightly says that Kaiser “has difficulty relating the curse to the promise,” and goes on to describe the importance of the covenantal curse found in Ge 12:1-3.

grace-salvation are also conjoined into a single distinct idea. Both elements are distinct, but they cannot be divorced from one another. This leads to the examination of the thematic approach of James Hamilton.

### **3.2.2 The thematic approach of James Hamilton**

Subsequent to Kaiser's presentation of "blessing-promise" as the central theme of the Old Testament, a relatively recent work in the area of biblical theology has been published that advanced the argument of Kaiser. In 2010, James Hamilton produced a Biblical Theology titled *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*. Before he published his work, Hamilton presented his thesis in seed form for discussion to the Biblical Theology Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship in 2004. The results of this discussion were later published in 2006 in the Tyndale Bulletin titled *The Glory of God in Salvation Through Judgment – The Centre of Biblical Theology*.

Hamilton's assertion that the centre of biblical theology is the glory of God in salvation through judgment<sup>68</sup> is motivated by a need for transformation in the church that results in beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ (2Co 3:18-4:6) and that this glory is both a judging glory and a saving glory (Hamilton, 2010:41-42). Unlike Kaiser, Hamilton enters into a fairly detailed discussion about the existence of a centre in biblical theology. The following summary of Hamilton's biblical theology will include both his article and his book and treat them as presenting a single unified idea.

Influenced by scholars such as David Noel Freedman and David Trobisch, Hamilton presents an argument for the existence of a biblical centre. By asserting that the centre of the Bible's theology acts as a centre of gravity for all its other themes, Hamilton (2006:59) states that the glory of God presents itself as the apex of the purposes of God. While Hamilton does not claim to be the first to discover this theme, his approach is somewhat unique because he combines judgment and grace together as the causal elements of God's glory.

Contrary to his critics, Hamilton believes that the issue is not whether a theological centre of the Bible can hold, but that those who do not really "listen carefully" to the

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<sup>68</sup> The term "judgment" can be misleading, as it can infer acquittal or innocence after the judgment. Hamilton's meaning in using the word judgment is that of God's wrath; i.e., God has pronounced his judgment on the world.

Bible will not see the glory of God, and thus will miss its unity (Hamilton, 2010:40). The idea of the judgment, justice, mercy, and grace of God are spread throughout the corpus of the biblical text, yet can be seen as a clear interlinking theme that connects and displays the glory of God. Not only does God intend to reveal his glory through these actions, He actually magnifies his glory by having them intertwined. In support of Hamilton's view, Routledge (2008:313) states that this increasingly spectacular picture is not just that God is both justice and mercy, but that it is his own justice and judgment that actually highlights his mercy and grace, and illuminates it in a way that is unparalleled.

Given the debate around the viability of a unique centre of biblical theology, and the trend even among the "centrists" to hold to a multiplex of themes, Hamilton (2006:61) states his assertion of the existence of a prominent centre.

The centre of biblical theology is defined as the concept to which biblical authors point as the ultimate reason why God performs creative acts, his relationship with his image-bearers, his judgment of wrong doing, his salvation by his mercy, and his renewal of creation at the consummation of history (Hamilton, 2006:61). The biblical centre acts as the centre of gravity for all the Bible's other themes, and presents itself as the apex of the purposes of God who speaks and acts from creation and redemption to judgment and consummation (2006:59).

In advancing the idea of the existence of a controlling theme or "ultimate reason" for God's actions, Hamilton (2006:61) states, "If one of the Bible's themes is presented as the ultimate reason for all that God does, and if this theme is not only an unstated presupposition of the biblical authors but also the stated explanation they give to justify the ways of God to men, then we would seem to have a plausible centre of the Bible's theology." Because both covenantal and dispensational systematic theologians emphasise the glory of God in their respective theologies, Hamilton points to the glory of God as the overriding purpose, and not merely supportive of other themes. This is the central theme.

In its broadest sense, the entirety of the Bible can be summarised in four words: *creation, fall, redemption, restoration* (Hamilton, 2010:49). This is supported by the observation that everyone recorded in the Bible who experience God's deliverance does so within the realm and environment of his judgment (Hamilton, 2006:62).

Hamilton provides various examples from the hope of the seed coming out of judgment in the Garden (Ge 3:15), to the glory of Yahweh appearing in Ex 16:7-10 as a response to the grumbling of the people, condemning their lack of faith while simultaneously providing for their needs, to Noah's deliverance out of the floodwaters, and throughout the denouncements of the prophets where the glory of Yahweh departs (Ez 10:4, 18; 11:23) only to return in restoration (Ez 43:4; 44:4).

The theme of God's glory in salvation through judgment is explored in the following chapters of Hamilton's Old Testament Theology:

- Chapter 2: in the Torah
- Chapter 3: in the Prophets
- Chapter 4: in the Writings
- Chapter 5: in the Gospels and Acts
- Chapter 6: in the Letters of the New Testament
- Chapter 7: in Revelation

The methodology employed by Hamilton does not focus so much on the discussion of specific passages (like Ge 6:6-7 and Ex 32:12-14 and other controversial passages), but rather deals with the storyline of each book in every section. By looking at the flow of the Torah, Hamilton (2010:73) demonstrates that God's creation begins with his goodness. In fact, he describes the Garden of Eden as portraying a "cosmic temple, a holy dwelling place of God." This makes the act of Adam and Eve's sin so conspicuous and deserving of judgment.

The idea of judgment is not only introduced in Ge 3, but "provides fundamental imagery that is reused and interpreted throughout the rest of the Old Testament." (Hamilton, 2010:76-77). This observation highlights a major error in many approaches to biblical theology. Noting that many people approach biblical theology in the same manner as a computer that compiles and collates data, Hamilton (2010:77) observes that "Too much biblical theology has fallen prey to the word-study fallacy and has failed to see that themes can be developed with synonymous terms." When we see God's salvation coming through judgment, we are given key insight into the nature of God. These insights are then demonstrated throughout the corpus of both the Old and New Testaments.

Since God acts “for his own sake,” the biblical authors understood God to be ultimate, underived, primal, and central. The purposes of God are what is most important to God, and whatever is most important to God is most important to the biblical authors.

This evidence is sufficient warrant for defining the centre of biblical theology as the ultimate purpose the biblical authors ascribe to God. In addition, this evidence also passes the four validation tests for proposed centres of biblical theology outlined by G. K. Beale (1997:45-46).

*First, the proposed centre needs to be shown to be more overarching than other centres, with the others logically sub-categories of it . . . . Second, the proposed centre needs to be related to the various major themes of the New Testament documents to see if it adequately comprehends the diversity present throughout the New Testament . . . . Third, any viable centre must be integrally related to major Old Testament themes be undergirded by a broad story-line which expresses a theological world-view or belief system about God's relationship with humanity, and be anchored in Christ's death and resurrection. Fourth, each competing centre needs to be analysed in turn for its comprehensiveness to see if it might not be the most overarching.*

God saves people through his judgment to display the glory of his character at the fall, the flood, Israel's exodus from Egypt, their exile from the Promised Land, at the cross, and at the existential point of conversion for everyone who repents of sin and believes unto salvation. Ultimately, God's glory will also be displayed at the consummation of all things at the return of Christ.

Hamilton's reasoning is logically sound and his convictions firm. God's glory in salvation through judgment is not a penultimate purpose of God, but rather is *the* ultimate purpose which stands unsurpassed. It is the glory of God manifested in judgment and grace that is the ultimate reason that God creates, judges, and redeems (Hamilton, 2010:562).

### **3.3 A way forward**

As stated in Chapter 1, the methodology used in the present study will follow that of Kaiser, with his commitment to an exegetical examination of the text (Kaiser, 1978a:18). Kaiser's commitment to the MT as the sole authoritative source for the Old

Testament is combined with a commitment to the principle of progressive revelation. He argues for a biblical centre that functions as a unifying principle that not only provides unity in the Old Testament, but also continues unfolding in the New Testament. Kaiser harmonises all the longitudinal themes or variety of viewpoints through the term “promise” (Hasel, 1991:53).

In addition to Kaiser’s exegetical methodology, this study will also incorporate the biblical theological approaches of Kaiser and Hamilton. This study partially agrees with Kaiser’s definition of promise or promise-plan for a biblical centre, and also closely aligns with Hamilton’s view of God’s glory in salvation through judgment as the biblical centre.

Kaiser’s view is taken here as correct, but incomplete. The concept of “promise” needs to be expanded to include the biblical theme of “judgment.” The idea of promise does carry through the entire Old Testament and into the New Testament, but the promise cannot stand on its own. What makes the promise so enticing and appealing is that it is given in the midst of divine wrath. The promise is given when it is undeserved, so the element of grace must somehow be part of this unifying centre.

If the theme of grace within judgment extends not only through the Old Testament, but throughout the New Testament as well, then it should be seen in clear statements regarding the purpose and plan of God. For this, two passages are offered.

**Proverbs 16:4**

The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

**Romans 9:22-24**

<sup>22</sup> What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup> And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, <sup>24</sup> even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

From these texts, it is clear that God has a purpose in judgment as well as grace. In Pr 16:4, there is a parallelism between the two accusative nouns with their own final clause (with ל) separated by the particle ו.

everything  
the wicked

for its own purpose  
for the day of evil

This text indicates that wickedness and wicked people are actually accomplishing God's intended purpose. The judgment of the wicked by God is found throughout the wisdom literature and the whole of the Bible. The point is that just like at creation, God is ultimately satisfied, or comforted (נחם) with Himself when He accomplishes his purpose.

In Ro 9:22-24, Paul gives a concrete illustration of God's sovereignty over salvation. In v. 21, the potter is rightly set apart from the pot as having ultimate authority and ability to accomplish anything. In the illustration, the apostle makes it clear that both vessels of wrath (unbelievers prepared for destruction) and vessels of mercy (believers prepared beforehand for glory) glorify God. The former demonstrate the just and righteous wrath of God while the latter reveal the riches of his glory, which is grace. The grand scheme of God is clear: to display his glory through the revelation of righteous wrath and judgment on sin and sinners, and to display his glory through the revelation of undeserved grace in the midst of his own wrath.

Both of these displays are pictures of perfect balance and symmetry. These are two pictures (judgment and grace) that stand in apparent diametric opposition, but in actuality, they are symbiotic: grace is not grace without the reality of judgment.

## Chapter 4

### A lexical study of נחם

Lexicons and commentaries generally present a variety of meanings for the Hebrew verbal root נחם. The notions of God comforting Himself, of God "repenting" (being sorry) and of God changing his mind are all possible within the semantic field of the Hebrew verbal root, and in that sense these concepts are linked. Trying to distil a particular meaning for this word purely on the semantics of נחם is difficult. Parunak (1975:512) justly asserts that the major interest in the meaning of this root and its stems (primarily the Niphal stem) has been predominantly theological because of its use in texts that describe the "repentance" of God.

This theological interest is evidenced by the changing terminology in English translations for נחם from the 1611 KJV to the modern Bible versions like the NIV, NASB, and ESV. While theology is essential to our thinking about the nature and character of God, it must be grounded on the syntactical and lexical meaning of words in their context. Nathan Söderblom said it best when he wrote, "Die Philologie ist das Nadelöhr, durch das jedes theologische Kamel in den Himmel der Gottesgelehrtheit eingehen muss."<sup>69</sup> Philology must necessarily precede theology to arrive at a plausible interpretation of a particular passage.

#### 4.1 Theological implications

Few commentators agree on the exact meaning of the word נחם as it relates to God's decisions and actions. In many instances, the meaning of the word is readily apparent from the context. However, a number of difficult and enigmatic texts remain in which a slightly different translation would reflect a different theology. Specifically, the most controversial problem passages of God's repentance (or non-repentance) lie in historical passages.

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<sup>69</sup>Originally quoted by J. M. van Veen in *Nathan Söderblom* (cited by Malherbe, 1961:119). The translation is "Philology is the eye of the needle through which every theological camel must enter the heaven of theology."

The lexical meaning of נחם from various lexicons and word study sources in each of the Hebrew stems is harmonised and given below:<sup>70</sup>

<b>Stem</b>	<b>Lexical Definition</b>
Piel	comfort, console, pity, requite, strengthen, feel sympathy for someone, observe a period of mourning, getting over grief, express condolence by a messenger, take away someone's pain, compassion
Pual	be comforted
Niphal	comfort (oneself), console (oneself), regret, repent, be sorry, lament, grieve, mourn, complete a time of mourning, to ease (oneself)
Hithpael	grieve, repent, comfort (oneself), to take vengeance,

With all the different meanings and interpretations available for נחם, where does one begin? There has been much discussion on the possibility of the “repentance” of God in the past century<sup>71</sup> which was based largely on the theology of God’s impassibility. Parunak (1975:512) separates the theological debaters into two groups. The first group “insist that ‘change’ (of attitude or mind) is the basic connotation of the root, which ‘has no necessary connection with sorrow or regret.’ On the other hand, this change is frequently related to the emotions as well as to the will and rational judgment.”

The wide semantic range and divergent theological implications of the potential meaning of נחם creates a problem for biblical translation. A representative cross section of various English Bible translations are shown in the tables in Appendix A, which shows the movement of the translation of every use of נחם from the Geneva Bible (1599), to the King James 1611 Version, through to the English Standard Version (2001). This study reviewed translations from over a four-century span, as well as translations that were produced using two different methodologies; formal equivalence

<sup>70</sup> Taken from BDB,637; Koehler-Baumgartner, 1994-2000:608-609; Holladay, 1988:234; Gesenius, 1979:544; Davidson, 1970:544; TWOT, 2:530; NIDOTTE, 3:81-83; TLOT, 2:734-735; TDOT, 9:340-355; SWANSON, 1997; and Parunak, 1975:514. More detail is given below in Section 4.2.

<sup>71</sup> The idea of God’s repentance has been widely discussed (see Chapter 1 – Introduction).

and dynamic equivalence.<sup>72</sup> In addition, to provide breadth to the study, some English Bible versions were consulted which relied on a methodology of paraphrasing.<sup>73</sup>

In the fifty-three uses of the Piel and Pual stems of נָחַם (51X-Piel, 2X-Pual), the translation of נָחַם essentially remains the same. In the majority of instances נָחַם is translated as “comfort”; occasionally the later translations preferred the alternate translation “console.” The Hithpael stem (7X) is almost as consistent. In four out of the seven uses of the Hithpael, the word “comfort” is retained while later versions prefer “compassion.” Of the three remaining uses, one (Eze 5:13) is translated as “comfort” in the KJV, the RSV as “satisfy myself,” and in the NASB as “be appeased.”

Although the more recent translations differ slightly, the words used in translations are synonymous in meaning. In the final two uses of the Hithpael (Dt 32:36; Nu 23:19), the variation in translation is a bit more pronounced. In Dt 32:36, the KJV and later ASV translate נָחַם as “repent,” but the RSV changed this to “have compassion” which was followed by the NASB, NRSV, and ESV. Likewise, in Nu 23:19, the word “repent” was used for נָחַם in the KJV, ASV, and RSV, but the NASB changed the translation to “changed his mind” which was continued by the NRSV and ESV. This variation in translation reflects two divergent meanings of נָחַם in the Hithpael.

In the Niphal stem, the variations are more striking. Out of the forty-eight uses of the Niphal stem, only eight are translated as “comfort” by the KJV. Of these eight, seven retain the English rendering of “comfort” through the translations, with some modifications to “console.” The eighth usage (Isa 57:6) is difficult, and the exact meaning is not clear, but the translation “comfort” in the KJV is modified in later translations to “be appeased” and eventually to “relent.” The meaning appears to be God’s being “comforted” or “appeased” by a libation that would cause Him to stop or “relent” from delivering his wrath.

The problem, then, is in the remaining forty uses of נָחַם, and in particular the usages in historical texts that deal with God and his emotions emanating from a prior divine decision and resulting in a perceived “change” of action or plan. In each of these uses, the KJV translates נָחַם as “repent,” but this translation was changed over time in

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<sup>72</sup> See Appendix A for discussion about these two different methodologies of translation.

<sup>73</sup> Many, if not most English Bible versions claim to have some use of form equivalence and dynamic equivalence methodology. It is difficult to classify any one Bible version to a particular methodology.

English Bible translations to reflect alternate meanings of נחם in the Niphal like “be sorry,” “regret,” “relent,” “change of mind,” “move to pity,” or “have compassion.” These alternate meanings could create a difficulty for those who hold to God’s full immutability,<sup>74</sup> and one can either perform a detailed investigation of the word נחם in these passages, or else adjust one’s total scheme of theology to allow a penitent deity. It would be foolish to accept the second option without a serious effort at the first (Parunak, 1973:1).

## 4.2 Lexical analyses

There has been much study performed on the Hebrew verb נחם over the past century, especially since the debate over God’s impassibility in the early part of the twentieth century. Present day scholars are far more willing to attribute true emotional experience to God than scholars of past history. Traditional theists insist on the interpretation of anthropathism to protect immutability, while Open Theists claim to take the text at face value and propose that God expected too much from humanity and made a mistake (Gould, 2005:20).

In recent years, two scholars have provided more in-depth proposals for the semantic range of נחם: H. Van Dyke Parunak and H. Simian-Yofre. At the time of his work, Parunak (1975:513) stated that he knew of no other published synchronic analysis of נחם. The *TDOT* (1986<sup>75</sup>) entry for נחם was provided by Simian-Yofre. While not as systematic as Parunak,<sup>76</sup> Simian-Yofre does interact with Parunak’s work and provides a slightly different set of conclusions.

The goal of the present study is not to forge new ground on the lexical work performed by capable scholars. The focus of the study is rather to offer a solution within the framework of the theme of “grace within judgment” in the Old Testament on the basis of existing lexical work. The proposition is then inductively demonstrated in historical

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<sup>74</sup> The translation “repent” also has the potential to create difficulty for the exegete who holds to God’s full immutability, but the translation “repent” was typically used in an anthropomorphic sense with an impassible God. These subsequent translations such as “regret” or “be sorry” came directly after the acceptance of God’s passibility, and could infer a more literal (i.e. non-anthropomorphic) sense.

<sup>75</sup> The date of the original German edition (TWAT) of the relevant volume, from which the English translation (TDOT) was made.

<sup>76</sup> See Gould (2005:23-24).

passages where mention is made of God's נחם as a plausible solution. Thus the lexical work of Parunak and Siman-Yofre will be discussed, along with other standard works.

Before a detailed discussion of the individual uses of נחם can begin it is helpful to discuss some of the conclusions of both Parunak and Simian-Yofre. Both scholars have approached the root with an understanding of the complexity of its contexts and uses, yet each one develops differing analyses and conclusions relating to the Niphal and Hithpael stems. Relative to the Piel and Pual stems, both see a less nuanced usage of נחם, and see a more uniform translation as “comfort,” “console,” or even “strengthen” (Parunak, 1975:516-517; Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:351).

#### 4.2.1 H. Van Dyke Parunak

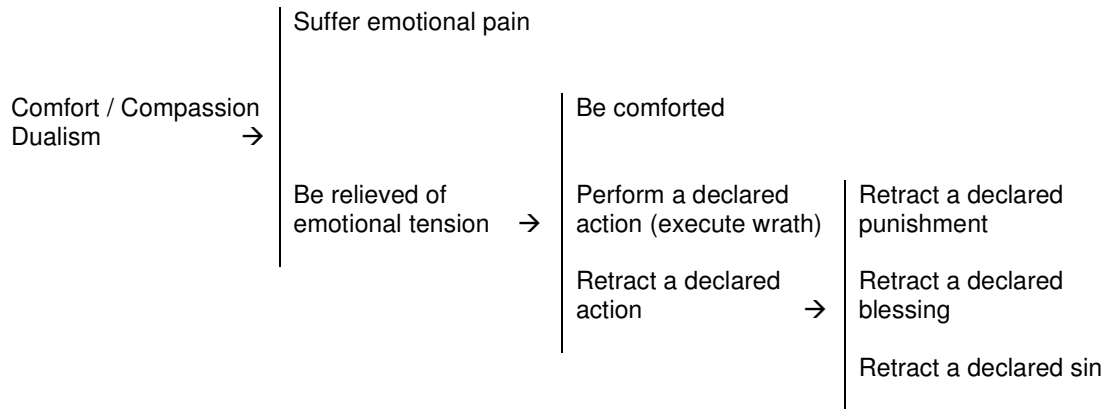
In the Piel / Pual stems, Parunak sees a dualism between “comfort” and “compassion,” noting “It is the nature of comfort that the pain felt by the one who is comforted is shared by the one who comforts. Comforters undertake their work because they sense the bereavement suffered by the mourner.” (Parunak 1975:517). Thus, the tension between mourning and comforting one who mourns is non-existent and is relieved by the concept of compassion.

This idea of compassion is taken up even further by noting that the most common single parallel for the Piel and Pual נחם is the Hebrew ניד, which Parunak (1975:517) suggests the idea of “comfort, show sympathy.” “This sympathetic pain, or “compassion,” lies at the heart of the biblical concept of comfort. This is suggested by the parallelism of *nḥm* Piel and Pual with *nûd*, and by the twofold sense of *nihûm* as “comfort” and “compassion.” (1975:517). This idea is carried forward in the analysis of the Hithpael and Niphal stems.

Parunak divides the basic meanings of the Hithpael and Niphal נחם in the following categories:

- Suffer emotional pain
- Be comforted, comfort oneself
- Execute wrath
- Retract punishment
- Retract blessing
- Retract (a life of) sin

Because the Hithpael only offers seven occurrences in six contexts, it was combined with the Niphal in the analysis. The semantic field of the Hithpael and Niphal נחם is outlined through the following chart (Parunak, 1975:527):



Parunak’s analysis begins with synthesising the items on the far right of the table and then working towards the left. Retracting a declared punishment and retracting a declared blessing present a unified concept, which are combined under the heading “Retract a declared action.” This concept then stands in polarity with performing a declared action (execute wrath). This polarity is resolved under the heading “Be comforted,” since a righteous removal of inappropriate action (wrath or blessing) when it is not warranted relieves a tension in the same way as providing an appropriate action relieves tension (Parunak, 1975:525). “Be comforted” is then a unified concept with “execute wrath” and are combined under the heading “Be relieved of emotional tension.” This concept, then stands in polarity with “Suffer emotional pain.” This polarity is resolved through observing the basic sense of נחם as “comfort” or “console,” and the idea of compassion as sharing in the pain of another.

The tension is resolved by suggesting a semantic development of metonymy of cause for effect, describing “compassion” by the activity (“comforting”) which led to it (Parunak, 1975:527). Thus, comfort (being relieved of emotional pain) is united with compassion (comforting someone by feeling their pain).

In summary, Parunak defines the Hebrew נחם as “comfort,” “console,” or “compassion” for every usage. The reflexive aspect of the Niphal and Hithpael maintain this usage, and the aspect of “sympathy” is expressed as “suffer emotional pain.” The subject is self-comforted either by performing or retracting a declared action (Parunak, 1975:

532). Although Parunak’s inductive approach is helpful, his extrapolation of an “original” or “base” meaning for the Hebrew נחם in all stems is subjective and open to question. The overall analysis, however, is helpful when considering the etymology (Section 4.3 below) and usage (Section 4.4 below) of נחם.

### 4.2.2 Horácio Simian-Yofre

While Simian-Yofre differs in methodology with Parunak, they do share points of agreement. As stated above, Simian-Yofre sees no real variation in the Piel and Pual stems, and maintains the translation “comfort” or “strengthen” in all cases (Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:351). In the Hithpael and Niphal, however, he takes a different approach of classifying the semantic domains.

The semantic domains for the verb נחם are classified into two broad categories based on the Piel and Niphal stems (*comfort* for the Piel, *repent* [of] for the Niphal). Like Parunak, the semantic domain of the Hithpael is included with the Niphal. Each of these domains involve the emotional realm (a change of feeling on the part of the one who repents or comforts), and the realm of de-facto futility (regret over something that has already been done or which cannot be altered, or consolation for someone who cannot be helped). But, since a majority of the texts that use the Hebrew verb נחם do not contain either of these as primary ideas, he proposes that every usage of the verb נחם contains the unified concept of “the attempt to influence a situation.” (Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:342).

The idea of influencing a situation has various gradations, which includes forms of regret, remorse, and even actions of direct involvement. In addition, these gradations are further clarified when combined with the temporal sense, such as changing the course of events or refraining from an action in the present, influencing a future decision, or resolving oneself or dissociating oneself from a consequence of the past (Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:342).

Essentially, Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:342) sees two senses<sup>77</sup> of use as the rule for נחם; decision / effect and emotion / affect. In essence, in all cases found (past, present, future) in both of these senses, the use of נחם involves not just emotions, but actions. In 1Sa 15:11, 35, even though Yahweh “regrets” his decision to make Saul king,

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<sup>77</sup> Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:342) calls these “the twin factors of decision / effect and emotion / affect.”

“Yahweh’s reaction paves the way for his irrevocable promise of steadfast love toward the house of David” (1986:343). Emotion will never be isolated and lacking any kind of resolve or influencing action.

This effect and affect aspect is also visible in the Hithpael stem by the expressed relationship between two parties. In the seven uses of the Hithpael, a relationship exists either between Yahweh and his people or a specific person, or between different individuals. The key is that the stronger party supports the weaker, and takes an interest in their situation by helping to rectify their problems (Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:350). In this way, Simian-Yofre agrees with Parunak regarding the notion of a comfort-compassion polarity, and that compassion is an active form of expressed sympathy for another. He concludes, “Compassion and comfort thus turn out to be correlative aspects of the same act, starting from opposite poles” (Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:351).

Whether comfort or compassion, emotion or action, every aspect of the Hebrew נחם has concrete aspects. “Never are words of encouragement the source of comfort: it always springs from an act of Yahweh that truly transforms the sorrowful situation” (Simian-Yofre, TDOT:9:351).

Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:351) is not as restrictive as Parunak in concluding a “base” or “original” meaning for the Hebrew נחם, and allows for a more varied lexical domain. He defines the word as always containing an element of action that transforms a situation. Both emotion and action will lead to some sort of effect. Both Parunak and Simian-Yofre see a comfort–compassion polarity that is resolved with the idea that compassion expresses itself as sympathy that leads to a definite act for the weaker party that brings comfort.

A single solution or conclusion for securing the lexical domain for the Hebrew נחם still remains elusive. The variety of contexts, and theological difficulties (as with the “repentance of God” texts) provide the exegete with a number of difficulties. Although the work of these two scholars is helpful, the fact that independent research provides differing and sometimes contradictory conclusions demonstrates that the answer for the research question cannot be resolved on a simple lexical analysis alone.

## 4.3 Etymology of נחם

Every lexical study should have an etymological component, but the relative value of etymology varies inversely with the quantity of material available for the language (Silva, 1983:42). Silva demonstrates this by comparing the availability of ancient Greek literature, thus minimising the amount of words that only occur once or twice, with the small amount of Hebrew literature. The result is that there are no fewer than one thousand three hundred *hapax legomena* along with about five hundred words that occur only twice in the biblical Hebrew corpus, which makes a correct understanding of the etymology of נחם necessary for obtaining a proper understanding of the word itself (1983:43).

While vitally important for Hebrew lexicography, understanding etymology and the use of cognates is still only one component of an entire lexical analysis. To obtain a specific meaning for a word, or at least a narrow semantic field solely on the basis of etymology can never be more than an educated guess (Carson, 1984:32; Silva, 1983:38-51). This is true even in the case of tracing the root of a Ugaritic word, which is largely dependent on etymological identification due to the lack of available literature, so that De Moor (1973:85) can state the following rule: “An explanation which rests on the sole basis of etymology can never be anything more than a plausible hypothesis.” With this in mind, etymology is neither the starting point, nor the culmination of the lexical study of נחם, but rather assists in the process.

### 4.3.1 Akkadian

The earliest usage of a cognate for נחם is the Akkadian *na’amu(m)*, which von Soden (1972:2:694) translates as “kuhn vorgehen.”<sup>78</sup> Although the root *nhm* itself is not found in Akkadian (TDOT, 9:341), Jacob Levy (1924:3:370) postulates a common root for נחם and נח, thus influencing the Hebrew נחם by the meaning “to rest.”<sup>79</sup> Parunak

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<sup>78</sup> Parunak (1975:513-514) states that there is a possible cognate relationship between *na’amu(m)* and נחם, while Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:341) says the Akkadian word “is not related to *nhm*.”

<sup>79</sup> In agreement with Levy, Parunak (1975:514) sees a parallelism between נחם and נח in Ge 5:29 and Ezek. 5:13. Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:341), on the other hand, says there is no possible cognate relationship between the two words because of the different *h* phonemes in the different words. Gesenius (1996:100) points out that certain trilateral stems point to a bilateral base which forms a starting point of the same fundamental idea, and Clark (2000:xi-xii) notes that S. R. Frisch’s conclusion

(1975:513-514) agrees with Levy, stating that the cognate language of Akkadian does have *nḥ*, which is cognate to the Hebrew נחה, and thus shares its meaning “rest.”

The name נח most probably comes from the root נחה (Sarna, 1989:44), and some agree that it is not etymologically related to the root נחם.<sup>80</sup> The major consensus is that the relationship is through assonance,<sup>81</sup> although Waltke and O’Connor (1990:93-94) state that consonants occasionally interchange in Hebrew word formation resulting in words that are closely related in meaning and take on slightly different shapes. Fitzgerald (1978:481) has also collected examples of such variants, and demonstrated that there is often an interchange between the *l*, *n*, and *r* in the same word in various Semitic languages. Barrick (2011:5) also notes that certain Hebrew consonants and consonant clusters sometimes produce similar meanings even with some alteration in the order or arrangement of the consonants. A sample listing of interchanges of consonants in etymologically related words are shown below (2011:5):

נחה	settle down, rest	רחה	break, clearing, relief
נוה	grazing/stopping place	נוח	sigh
נחה	lead	רוח	spirit, breath, wind
הנה	encamp, settle for the night	רחה	break, clearing, relief

In addition, Parunak (1975:521-522) shows a parallel between נחם “comfort, console” and נקם “avenge” in Isa 1:24, and between נחם and נחה “rest.” The near assonance and alliteration of נחם with נקם tie these two words together. While the verbal נקם is

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that guttural consonants that appear in similar roots have related meanings, which dispels Simian-Yofre’s concerns.

<sup>80</sup> Freedman (1939a:206) stresses the problem when he says, “The name does not correspond to the interpretation [given to it], nor does the interpretation correspond to the name. The text should either have stated, ‘This same shall give us rest (*yeṯḥenu*),’ or, ‘And he called his name Nahman, saying: This same *ye-nahamenu*’; but does Noah correspond to *ye-nahamenu*?” He footnotes, “surely not.” Cassuto (1972a:288) also agrees, “The text should have either, *Noah* — *this one* will give us rest [נחה־ננו *y<sup>n</sup>nḥēnū*]; or, *Nahman* [נחה־נן *Nahmān*] — *this one* will bring us comfort [נחה־ננו *y<sup>n</sup>nahāmēnū*].” However, Speiser (1964:41) notes that “biblical etymologies are not guided by linguistic considerations.” Commenting on the LXX, Wevers (1993:73) states that the explanatory aetiology comprises a wrong etymology in MT, and thus the text is emended with a secondary reading of *διαναπαύσει ἡμᾶς* for the Hebrew נחה־ננו assuming it to be נחה־ננו and presuppose a Hiphil of נחה. Westermann (1984:360) calls this an improvement, yet Hamilton (1990:259) notes that in every other case of the causative form of *nūah*, there is no direct object. To be consistent, a preposition must be added to the word following the verb. For the contrary view see Chapter 4 — Lexical Study of נחם.

<sup>81</sup> This is the consensus of Sarna, Friedman, Leupold, Hamilton, Mathews, Wenham, and Driver. Bush (1976b:114) takes it as paronomasia.

not used in Ge 6:6-7, the idea of vengeance (the word is used by Lamech in Ge 4:15, 24) is in context, yet also when used in the Hithpael, נָקַם portrays vengeance that brings consolation in Ge 27:42, where Esau is “consoling himself” over the loss of his father’s blessing as he plots to kill Jacob (Mathews, 1996:343n151).

Hirsch (1959b:126) has an interesting comparison that assigns a meaning to the root נָח as “movement come to rest,” and phonetically relates נָח to the roots נוּחַ, נוּחַ, and נוּעַ. He defines the particle נָח as interrupted motion, or to hinder somebody in their intentions, while the particle נָח “I beg of you” is used to interrupt and change what we take to be an objectionable frame of mind in somebody. Finally, he takes the root נוּעַ to be actual movement towards a goal (1959b:126). The meaning of Lamech’s statement would then be “Not that we have to be busy, but that we tire ourselves out to no purpose, without attaining our goal, is what makes us wretched.” Hirsch goes on to push the meaning of the verb נָחַם to “consolation,” and defines consolation as “a complete reversal of the previous feeling regarding an occurrence.”

Going further, he gives נָחַם a meaning of repentance,<sup>82</sup> or a movement that is reversed. This definition is then connected to consolation, which, like repentance, is a complete giving up of a direction hitherto pursued. The point, however, is made. There is a strong relationship between the name of Lamech’s son, Noah (נֹחַ), and the Hebrew word נָחַם, not only because Lamech joins the name to his explanation, but probably also on wordplay in Hebrew. This is reflected in Hirsch’s (1959b:126) last sentences on the naming of Noah: “Hence, נָחַם, also where it means repentance, seems to be connected with the complete giving up of a direction hitherto held. But that is also consolation. A painful loss sets us in motion internally, consolation brings us to rest, closes the gap, and stays the motion.”

Taking Levy, Parunak, and Hirsch’s conclusions to be correct, it seems that the earlier meaning of נוּחַ (Niphal) in Hebrew relates to rest, and can be translated with “be comforted,” “to comfort oneself,” “to pacify oneself,” “to be appeased,” or “to be at rest”. Since both נָחַם and נוּחַ possibly derive from the same root *nḥ*, the idea of resting should be at the core of the semantic range of both words.

Since both נָחַם and נוּחַ possibly derive from the same root *nḥ*, the idea of resting may be at the core of the semantic range of both words. Building on Parunak’s observation

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<sup>82</sup> This is Hirsch’s (1959b:126) definition.

on the relationship between נחם and נוה, the Hebrew root נוה “rest” (Holladay, 1988:231; Gesenius, 1979:538-539), is also found in the name of the “rest-bearer” Noah just prior to the flood account in Ge 5:29. This “rest-bearer” (Noah is the active substantive participle form of נוה) is parallel with the Niphal of נחם, so “this rest-bearer will bring rest from our work.” Clearly the idea is more of a cessation of toil and effort rather than an emotional joy out of the toil and effort. In Eze 5:13, the Hithpael of נחם is found in parallel with the Hiphil נוה where God’s anger is “caused to rest” because his wrath has “been satisfied,” so God is reflexively comforted, at rest, or satisfied.

### 4.3.2 Arabic

Earlier scholars trace the root נחם to the Arabic word *naḥama*, which means “the snorting of a horse,” and thus “to sigh,” or “to breathe,” either as a result of comfort or pain (Scharbert, 1955:62-65; Thomas, 1933:191-192, Michell, 1933:428; and Snaith, 1952:225-226). More recent scholars, however, reject this lexical assumption.<sup>83</sup> Parunak (1975:515), has raises serious doubts about this etymological relationship, showing that the concept of “breath,” “sigh,” or “snort” does not enter the Semitic vocabulary until the post-biblical period.<sup>84</sup> Siman-Yofre (TDOT, 9:341) takes a similar view because “the concrete semantic field associated with *nḥm* in the OT clearly differs from that associated with Arab. *nḥm*.” In addition, James Barr (1961:116-117) challenges Snaith’s description of נחם and its etymological relationship to the Arabic “to breathe hard.” The fundamental mistake in Snaith’s analysis is the misunderstanding that while etymology seeks the historical origin of a word, it does not necessarily arrive at the general or proper meaning.

Referencing the two examples cited by Snaith (אָשַׁר in Ps 1, and the word נחם) and in particular אָשַׁר in Ps 1, Barr (1961:116) states, “The etymological associations are used without any inquiry whether they existed in the minds of those who used the poem.”

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<sup>83</sup> See TLOT, 2:734, where Stoebe says, “The etymological relationship to Arab. *nḥm* ‘to breathe pantingly’ ... offers little insight, given the semantic development in the OT.” In addition, see Youngblood (1992:675), Chisholm (1995:387), Bergen (1996:170), and Barrick (2001:157) as current examples that also reject the etymological relationship between נחם and the Arabic *nḥm*.

<sup>84</sup> In his comparative study, Parunak says the root is not found by Lane in classical Arabic, and determines that the concept of “breath” actually comes later than the primary meaning of the Semitic נחם, which is “comfort” or “be comforted.”

Regarding the Hebrew word נחם, Snaith employs this very thinking in stating *a priori*, “Actually the word means ‘to take a breath of relief,’ the implication being ‘to breathe hard [as of a horse],’ as is shown in Arabic. The word therefore has to do with ‘change of attitude,’ ‘change of mind,’ any other association being incidental.” Because of this assumption, Snaith says that if נחם is translated “comfort,” it must be “comfort out of sorrow.” Barr’s response is quite direct:

*It is patently absurd to suppose that a use in Arabic for the breathing of a horse is decisive for discovering the sense in a religious Hebrew text. Moreover, the idea that if a sense is not given or implied in the ultimate etymology that sense is ‘accidental’, and therefore need not be taken into account in understanding the meaning of the word, is surely an impossible one. The whole argument is directed towards the importation of some general religious reflections into the supposed sense of the word...*

Snaith is rightly trying to define biblical repentance, and differentiating between pure sorrow and true change of attitude. He is emphasising man’s responsibility to turn from sinful behaviour and to turn to God, but he goes further than he should when he imports this idea into the meaning of a single word.

With Barr’s caution of using etymology without limits<sup>85</sup> and Parunak’s analysis showing the doubtful influence of the Arabic on the Semitic נחם, the primary meaning of נחם should not be derived from the Arabic *naḥama*. Any interpretation of the Hebrew נחם must be careful in avoiding this etymological argument (TDOT, 9:341).

### 4.3.3 Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Syriac

As a cognate language quite close to Biblical Hebrew, Ugaritic is an early and clear attestation of נחם. The root *nḥm* is found in several forms carrying the basic meaning “to console” (UT, 1965:443). Aistleitner (1974:204) lists two personal names using the root *nḥm*: *inḥm*, and *mnḥm*.

While there is lexical support for the idea of some emotion (i.e., to console), Marjo Korpel (1990:89) found that even though both in Ugarit and in Israel the most common representation of divine beings is in anthropomorphic images, “whenever the n’m of

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<sup>85</sup> Also, see Carson (1984:25-66) and Silva (1983:18-51).

God is mentioned, it is not a description of his emotional state, but rather is a description of his grace towards man.” (Korpel, 1990:167).

The root נחם is not found in biblical Aramaic (Parunak, 1975:514; TDOT, 9:341), but it is possibly referenced in Imperial Aramaic texts.<sup>86</sup> The Western Aramaic occurrences are cited in Levy (1924:3:370) who suggests the translation “eig. Jemdn.beruhigen” for the Piel and “trösten” for the Pael.

In the Syriac translations of the New Testament a root *nḥm* is used in the Pael, which Payne Smith (1981:II 2338) translates as “spirare fecit, excitavit mortuos,” meaning “restore to life,” “raise the dead,” or “to resuscitate.” Thomas (1933:192) sees this as a clear reference back to the Arabic “breathe” or “take a deep breath,” but his observation is perhaps tainted by accepting Arabic influence on the root.

Some level of relationship between “comfort,” “strengthen,” “resurrect,” “breathe deeply” and “rest” could have developed over time. However, what is important is the main sense of the word when the relevant Old Testament texts were written. Whereas the meaning of נחם (Niphal) in the Old Testament most probably is “comfort,” or to “be comforted,” “breathe” and “resurrect” may be later derived senses (Parunak, 1975:515).

## 4.4 Usage of נחם

The root נחם appears a total of one hundred forty-one times in the Old Testament (TLOT, 2:735). Proper names and substantives based on the root are used some thirty-three times, with the rest being verbal forms. This section will detail the biblical usage for each of the categories, and various charts will be provided to show the change in English translations over time for the different uses of נחם in its noun forms as well as by each verbal stem. The breakdown of all the uses of נחם is listed below:

### 4.4.1 Proper names (22X)

There are a total of seven proper names with the root נחם found in twenty-two usages which are listed below with their biblical references.

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<sup>86</sup>Parunak (1975:514) observes that Jean-Hoftijzer cites the root in Imperial Aramaic, “where the sense is obscured by a damaged text.”

מְנַחֵם	<i>Menahem—King of Israel</i>	8X—2Ki 15:14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
נָחַם	<i>Naham—A Leader in Judah</i>	1X—1 Ch 4:19
נְחֻם	<i>Nahum—The Prophet</i>	1X—Na 1:1
נְחַמְנִי	<i>Nehamani—A man who returned from the Exile</i>	1X—Ne 7:7
נָחֻם	<i>Nahum—A man who returned from the Exile</i>	1X—Ne 7:7
נְחֻמְיָה	<i>Nehemiah—Governor of Judah</i>	8X—Ezr 2:2; Ne 1:1; 3:16; 7:7; 8:9; 10:1; 12:26; 12:47
תְּנַחֲמֶת	<i>Tahumeth—A Hebrew officer after the fall of Jerusalem</i>	2X—2Ki 25:23; Jer 40:3

Originally, these names were substitute names (TLOT, 2:734), but the contexts of the names provide no assistance in determining the core meaning of the root (Parunak, 1975:515).

#### 4.4.2 Substantives (11X)

Siman-Yofre (TDOT, 9:354) and Butterworth (NIDOTTE, 3:82) count five substantives by separating the two forms of תְּנַחֲמוּם (תְּנַחֲמוּם—Ps 94:19; Isa 66:11; Jer 16:7, תְּנַחֲמוֹת—Job 15:11; 21:2). Parunak (1975:515) combines all the forms of תְּנַחֲמוּם leaving only four substantives. Both Simian-Yofre and Parunak acknowledge the difficulty of the *hapax legomenon* נָחַם in Hos 13:14, because it seems to contradict the context of the verse. All the substantives except for נָחַם clearly indicate comfort, consolation, or compassion. Using Parunak's classification, each of the usages of the substantives of נָחַם and their biblical references are listed below.

נְחַמְתִּי	<i>Nehamati—comfort, consolation</i>	2X—Job 6:10; Ps 119:50
תְּנַחֲמוּם	<i>Tanhum—comfort, consolation</i>	5X—Job 15:11; Job 21:2; Ps 94:19; Isa 66:11; Jer 16:7
נָחַם	<i>Nihum—comfort, compassion</i>	3X—Isa 57:18; Hos 11:8; Zec 1:13
נָחַם	<i>Noham—compassion, repentance</i>	1X—Hos 13:14

In addition, a cross-section translation summary of six English Bible translations is provided below to observe any possible shift in English translations of the substantives.

King James Version	1611
American Standard Version	1901
Jewish Publication Society	1917
Revised Standard Version	1952
New American Standard	1971
New International Version	1984

All of these translations were done from the original Hebrew as far as the Old Testament is concerned. What this analysis reveals is that over a three-hundred-and-fifty year span, there is a consistency in the choice of words between the ASV and JPS translations in all verses except for Hos 11:8. With the exception of the word “repenting” in the KJV in Hos 11:8, and the word “repentance” in the KJV, ASV, and JPS in Hos 13:14, the consistent translation of the substantives relates to “comfort” or “console.” Other than these two verses, the difference is only stylistic since the concepts “compassion,” “consolation,” and “comforting” are all within the same semantic field. The translations are virtually synonymous.

### English Translation Summary of נחם Substantives

Verse	Noun	KJV	ASV	JPS	RSV	NASB	NIV
Job 6:10	נַחֲמָתִי	comfort	consolation	Comfort	comfort	consolation	consolation
Ps 119:50	נַחֲמָתִי	comfort	comfort	Comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 15:11	תְּנַחֲוּם	consolations	consolations	Consolations	consolations	consolations	consolations
Job 21:2	תְּנַחֲוּם	consolations	consolations	Consolations	consolations	consolations	consolation
Ps 94:19	תְּנַחֲוּם	comforts	comforts	Comforts	consolations	consolations	consolation
Isa 66:11	תְּנַחֲוּם	consolations	consolations	Consolations	consoling	comforting	comforting
Jer 16:7	תְּנַחֲוּם	consolation	consolation	Consolation	consolation	consolation	console
Isa 57:18	נַחֲם	comforts	comforts	Comforts	comfort	comfort	comfort
Hos 11:8	נַחֲם	<b>repenting</b>	compassions	Compassions	compassion	compassion	compassion
Zec 1:13	נַחֲם	comfortable	comfortable	Comforting	comforting	comforting	comforting
Hos 13:14	נַחֲם	<b>repentance</b>	<b>repentance</b>	<b>Repentance</b>	compassion	compassion	compassion

In Hos 11:8, נחם is the subject of the Niphal verb כמר “be kindled.” From the parallel usage in Ge 43:30 and 1Ki 3:26 (both use the Niphal כמר with רַחֲמִים “tender mercy”),

it is evident that נחם carries emotional content (TDOT, 9:354; Parunak, 1975:516; NIDOTTE, 3:82; and TWOT, 2:571). The verse itself speaks of the LORD “turning” his heart from judgment on Israel (cf. vv. 3-7). The KJV uses “repentings” to refer to God’s grace in the midst of expected judgment (cf. v. 9). This translation was changed in the 1901 ASV translation to “compassions,” and was retained in all subsequent translations.<sup>87</sup>

The *hapax-legomenon* נחם in Hos 13:14 is less clear. The word can mean both “caution” and “self-control,” or simply “compassion” (TDOT, 9:354). If v. 14a is taken as an indicative statement (“I will ransom them from the power of Sheol”) rather than a rhetorical question, then this contradicts the idea of compassion (on his people) being hidden from God. On the other hand, if v. 14a is taken as a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer, it contradicts the further question in 14b, “O Sheol, where is your sting?”

### Contextual Analysis of of נחם Substantives

Verse	Noun	Subject	Object	Context
Job 6:10	נְחֻמָּתִי	Man	Man	Job’s obedience to God is his comfort or consolation in his misery
Ps 119:50	נְחֻמָּתִי	God	Man	Comfort is taken in remembering what God has previously said
Job 15:11	תְּנַחֲמוּם	God	Man	Job is accused of refusing the “comforts” of God as being too small
Job 21:2	תְּנַחֲמוּם	Man	Man	Job challenges his friends to take his words as being words of “comfort”
Ps 94:19	תְּנַחֲמוּם	God	Man	Comfort is received when remembering God’s lovingkindness
Isa 66:11	תְּנַחֲמוּם	Man	Man	A metaphorical picture of people taking comfort in Jerusalem’s salvation
Jer 16:7	תְּנַחֲמוּם	Man	Man	A metaphorical picture of taking a drink which will provide comfort
Isa 57:18	נָחַם	God	Man	God will give “comfort” to those whom he “heals” from his judgment
Hos 11:8	נָחַם	God	Man	God’s compassion increases as He gives grace to his covenant people
Zec 1:13	נָחַם	God	Man	God speaks words “of comfort” to an angel in Zechariah’s prophecy
Hos 13:14	נָחַם	God	Man	God speaks of hiding his “compassion” in giving words of judgment

The KJV, ASV, and JPS are the only translations of the sample that translate v. 14a as an indicative statement, and a fact that God will promise to eventually redeem Ephraim—thus the need for the translation “repentance” because the verse speaks of God’s judgment on Sheol, and He will not “repent from” (i.e. abandon) that judgment. The RSV translators changed the understanding of v. 14a to be a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer, which continues the threat of v. 13 and v. 15, and leads

<sup>87</sup> This is not to say that every Bible translation since the ASV retains the ASV’s choice. This statement is merely indicating that this is true for the sample translations used in this study.

to God's compassion being hidden, through the withdrawing of grace. In this case, the KJV, ASV, and JPS follow the indicative / repentance flow, and the RSV, NASB, and NIV follow the question / compassion flow.

The substantives portray a sense of satisfaction and rest, either to oneself based on receiving a given action, or as action given to another. The comfort is always received by man in these forms, and never received by God. Both man and God are the subjects of comfort or compassion, but in the case of these substantives, God is never the direct object that receives such comfort or compassion.

In summary, the substantives all generally carry the idea of comfort, consolation, or compassion. The נחם can either originate from God, or from people.

#### **4.4.3 Piel and Pual (53X)**

The Piel and Pual stems of the verb נחם are more uniform and less nuanced (TDOT:9:342) which favour the translation “comfort,” “console” or even “strengthen.”<sup>88</sup> A brief Piel / Pual analysis is described below, and English Bible versions were selected which would be representative in showing the major changes in wording over time. Again, the KJV is the “control” document, and the ASV and JPS translations are not included as they both fully agree with the KJV in the Piel and Pual stems. The versions selected to be reviewed are as follows:

King James Version	1611
Revised Standard Version	1952
New American Bible	1970
New American Standard	1971
New Revised Standard Version	1989
New International Version	1984
New Living Translation	1996

The Piel and Pual stems occur a total of fifty-three times in the Hebrew text, with the Piel having the overwhelming use (51X). The Pual stem, while passive in nature, carries essentially the same meaning as the Piel, and so is included in this category.

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<sup>88</sup> See sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 where the work of Parunak and Simian-Yofre are discussed.

Both stems uniformly carry the basic meaning “comfort” as defined by most Hebrew lexicons.

In the fifty-three occurrences of the Piel and Pual stems there are thirty-two cases where the translation “comfort” is not consistently maintained. Of those that did change, there are only eight occurrences where the KJV translation “comfort” was changed to a synonym in the RSV. In seven out of its eight changes, the word “console” is used. The NRSV added three additional changes, “reassured,” “consolation,” and “console.” Out of the sample translations, by far the largest number of deviations from the KJV occurred in the NAB, with eighteen deviations from “comfort.” Out of these, thirteen are a form of “console.” The chart below lists only the verses which contain the Niphal נחם where the English translation in Bible versions has varied over time from the KJV.

### English Translation Summary of נחם Piel and Pual Differences

Verse	KJV	RSV	NAB	NASB	NRSV	NIV	NLT
Ge 5:29	comfort	bring relief	relief	give rest	bring relief	comfort	relief
Ge 37:35	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 50:21	comforted	comforted	speak kindly	comforted	reassured	reassured	reassured
2Sa 10:2	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	console	sympathy	sympathy
2Sa 10:3	comforters	comforters	condolence	comforters	condolences	sympathy	honour
2Sa 12:24	comfort	comfort	comforted	comfort	console	comforted	comforted
1Ch 19:2	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	console	sympathy	sympathy
1Ch 19:2	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	console	sympathy	
1Ch 19:3	comforter	consoler	consolers	comforter	comforter	sympathy	honour
Job 2:11	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console
Job 21:34	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
Job 42:11	comfort	comfort	comforted	comfort	comfort	consoled	comforted
Ps 23:4	comfort	comfort	give courage	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	comfort	comfort	comforter	comfort	comfort	comforter	powerless
Isa 12:1	comfort	comfort	consoled	comfort	comfort	comforted	comfort
Isa 22:4	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	console
Isa 49:13	comfort	comfort	comforts	comfort	comfort	compassion	compassion
Isa 51:3	comfort	comfort	have pity	comfort	comfort	compassion	take pity
Isa 51:19	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 54:11	comfort	comfort	consoled	comfort	comfort	comforted	desolate
Isa 61:2	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	tell
Jer 16:7	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:13	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:2	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	lift her out
La 1:16	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:21	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 14:23	comfort	console	console	comfort	console	consoled	understand
Eze 16:54	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	feel good
Na 3:7	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	comfort	regret
Zec 10:2	comfort	console	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	comfort

The principal verse where the meaning of the KJV “comfort” was significantly changed is Ge 5:29, where the RSV and NRSV changed “comfort” to “bring relief,” the NASB

and NLT changed to “give rest,” and the NAB changed to “relief.”<sup>89</sup> The idea of “give rest,” or “bring relief” further describes the “comfort” that Noah would bring, as it is bringing נחם “from our work and the toil of our hands.”

The translations which employed a greater use of dynamic equivalence methodology also maintained consistency with the KJV. The NIV translation only had thirteen changes from the KJV, with the majority choices being “console” (5X) and “sympathy” (5X). The remaining two words “compassion,” and “reassured” are also synonyms with “comfort.” The NLT was freer in its translation with seventeen changes, but in each case a synonym for “comfort” was employed to maintain a consistent meaning.

All of the verses where there was a deviation from the KJV in the RSV<sup>90</sup> list man as either subject or object. Almost half relate to comfort or consolation in death (1Ch 19:2, 3; 2Sa 10:2, 3). Two verses speak of the comfort realised when seeing a remnant of God’s people who receive grace in judgment (Eze 14:23; 16:54). Comfort is also provided in “bringing relief” from God’s judgment of work and toil (Ge 5:29), providing “reassurance” to Joseph’s brothers that they would have provision in Egypt (Ge 50:21), while the idols provide no comfort at all (Zec 10:2).

In the Piel and Pual verbal stems, God is never the object of נחם. He is the subject (providing comfort) in twenty-one out of its fifty-three uses. In all cases where God is the subject providing נחם, the act of God is void of any merit by the recipient (often Israel, Judah, or God’s people). In every case it is undeserved grace, mercy, and lovingkindness that is the basis for the נחם that is given. Various translations give preference to synonyms for “comfort” such as “console,” “sympathy,” “compassion,” or “relief.”

In summary, it is clear that there is no real variation in the translation of the Piel and Pual stems of נחם. The idea is one of providing or receiving comfort, consolation, sympathy, or relief regardless of whether the subject is Yahweh or man.

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<sup>89</sup> Notice the NIV translation in Ge 5:29 reverted back to the KJV’s “comfort.”

<sup>90</sup> The RSV is the first major translation with deviations from the KJV in translating the Piel נחם. Although the DRA version has two minor differences from the KJV of נחם in the Piel or Pual stem (Ecc 4:1; Isa 66:13), the RSV is the first major translation move away from the KJV’s “comfort.”

#### 4.4.4 Hithpael (7X)

Of the seven occurrences of the Hithpael in the Hebrew corpus, two are duplicates (Dt 32:36; Ps 135:14). This leaves a total of six possible contexts in which to analyse the stem. While this is hardly enough to make significant inductive conclusions (Parunak, 1975:518), it is important to note that one of the key “repentance of God” passages occurs in this stem (Nu 23:19). Out of the seven passages that contain the Hithpael, there are four major contexts of meaning. Three pairs of verses form three separate contexts, while Nu 23:19 stands out as a fourth context.

Using the KJV again as a control document, the other sample versions used to analyse the Hithpael are as follows:

King James Version	1611
Douay-Rheims Version	1899
Jewish Publications Society	1917
Revised Standard Version	1952
New American Bible	1970
New American Standard	1971
New International Version	1984

#### English Translation Summary of הִתְפַּאֵל Hithpael Differences

Verse	KJV	DRA	JPS	RSV	NAB	NASB	NIV
Ge 27:42	comfort	threateneth	comfort	comfort	settle accounts	console	comfort
Ge 37:35	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	consolation	comfort	comfort
Num 23:19	repent	be changed	repent	repent	change mind	repent	change mind
Dt 32:36	repent	have mercy	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Ps 119:52	comfort	comforted	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	repent	be entreated	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Eze 5:13	comforted	comforted	be eased	satisfy myself	satisfy myself	be appeased	be avenged

Since the ASV was in total agreement with the KJV, it was excluded from this analysis. The Roman Catholic versions varied greatly from the KJV, beginning with the DRA version in 1899. The DRA differed from the KJV in four of the seven uses of the Hithpael הִתְפַּאֵל while the NAB differed in six. The Jewish version (JPS), however, only had one change (Eze 5:18), although later Jewish versions made changes to five of the seven uses.

Essentially all of the versions except the DRA differed with the KJV on Eze 5:13, although they used synonyms of self-comfort such as being eased, satisfied, or

avenged. The main translation changes occurred in the duplicate pair (Dt 32:36; Ps 135:14) and in Nu 23:19.

The first pair (Ge 37:35; Ps 119:52) share a common meaning of intentionally comforting oneself, albeit under different circumstances and with different outcomes (Isaac refuses to comfort himself, and David comforts himself in God's ordinances). The second pair (Ge 27:42; Eze 5:13) share the common idea of comforting oneself in vengeance, or doing harm on another. The last pair (Dt 32:36; Ps 135:14) are essentially the same wording in the same context. The meaning of the Hithpael here is one of God withholding punishment on his people, and thus comforting Himself with his grace and desire to deliver his people. Nu 23:19 stands alone and will be analysed separately.

The reflexive mood usually associated with the Hithpael is clearly evident in the first pair (Ge 37:35; Ps 119:52). In Ge 37:35, Jacob refuses to be comforted by his family when he heard the report of the untimely death of his favourite son, Joseph, and so desires them to leave him alone. The Psalmist in Ps 119:52 reflexively takes comfort in the ordinances of God when he reflects on those ordinances in his affliction (v. 50). Holladay (1988:234) translates, "be comforted, consoled, end of time of mourning" and Gesenius (1979:544) gives the sense "to comfort oneself," or "to be comforted." The Psalmist's reflection on God's judgments brings an end to mourning over circumstances and produces comfort in newfound trust in the "ancient ordinances" of God. The comfort is reflexive because the "'ordinances' of God are present and effective" (A. Deissler, quoted by Stoebe, [TLOT:2:736]) In both verses, the subject is choosing a means to comfort (or not to comfort) himself in his circumstances.

Taking comfort or satisfaction in vengeance is shared in the second pair of verses (Ge 27:42 and Eze 5:13). The Hithpael נחם in Ge 27:42 does not describe Esau as "plotting revenge" against his brother, but rather as consoling himself, or having his anger come to rest with the thought of killing his brother Jacob (TDOT, 9:354; Parunak, 1975:522).

A similar idea of reflexive comfort found in vengeance is God's wrath being "spent" or "finished" in Eze 5:13. Stoebe (TLOT:2:737) sees a possible dittography with הַנְּחַמְתִּי and הַנְּחַמְתִּי but acknowledges that the Hithpael represents a parallel notion of providing consolation. The verb נחם is in parallel with the Hiphil verb ניה "cause to rest" and its

object **חַמְאִי** “my wrath.” God’s wrath is settled and at rest, thus bringing comfort to Himself.

The final pair of occurrences shows Yahweh’s comfort in his judicial activity in salvation, and is found in Dt 32:36 and the parallel passage, Ps 135:14 (TDOT, 9:351). Stoebe (TLOT:2:737) and Gesenius (1979:544) both give the meaning “to pity” with the LORD as the subject, pitying his people. Both analyses do little in unpacking the meaning.

Parunak (1975:529-530) shows that through a form-critical analysis of the passage, the pattern of receiving promised grace after the threat of a punishment from the LORD is found in both Dt 32:36 and Jdg 2:18, which both share the root **חַמַּ**.

**Parunak’s form critical analysis of **חַמַּ** in Dt 32:36 and Jdg 2:18**

		<b>Verses</b>	<b>Summary</b>
	I	Dt 32:1-14 Jdg 2:1-5	A statement of God’s care for the people in the Exodus and Conquest, and a summary of their ingratitude
	II	Dt 32:15-18 Jdg 2:11-13	A clear accusation against Israel for idolatry
	III	Dt 32:19-22 Jdg 2:14a	A description of God’s wrath, which was provoked by Israel’s idolatry
	IV	Dt 32:23-27 Jdg 2:14b-15	A declaration of the sentence against Israel, and the deliverance of Israel to other nations for punishment
	V	Dt 32:28-33 Jdg 2:16-17	A statement of Israel’s total ignorance of God’s means of salvation
	VI	Dt 32:34-43 Jdg 2:18	A description of how God delivers his people from proposed judgment by destroying their enemies

The entire chapter of Dt 32 is a prophetic witness (cf. 31:19, 21) against Israel, who has been abandoned by the LORD and left to her enemies (cf. 31:17, 18). This is all due to the apostasy of the nation, which went after foreign gods (cf. 31:16). A nearly identical pattern emerges in the summary of Israel’s servitude to her enemies in Jdg 2:11-23. When the text of Dt 32 is compared with the text of Jdg 2, the prophecy

fulfilment relationship and structural parallel between the passages becomes clear. Both passages follow a *rib*-pattern of legal controversies.<sup>91</sup>

The parallels between the passages are quite striking. Both Dt 32:36 and Jdg 2:18 use נחם (Dt—Hithpael, Jdg—Piel). Both involve God judging his rebellious people. Dt 32:36 shows God as having נחם because of the absolutely helpless (pitiable) state of his people “when He sees that their power is gone” (כִּי יִרְאֶה כִּי־אָזְלָת יָד). In Jdg 2:18, God has נחם because of the groaning of the people who groaned because of their oppressors.

Because of these parallels, and the *rib*-pattern found in both passages, Parunak defines the usage of נחם as being “comfort” or “have compassion” because God is showing compassion or comforting Himself by extending grace and retracting a punishment.

The single Hithpael that has a unique context (Nu 23:19), will be discussed in the detailed section dealing with the Niphal stem, because its circumstances closely resemble the Niphal in 1Sa 15:29. The other six occurrences, however, centre around the common meaning “comfort,” “comfort oneself,” or “to have compassion.”

#### 4.4.5 Niphal (48X)

The foregoing discussion of substantive forms of נחם, as well as the Piel, Pual, and Hithpael stems of the verbal form excluding Nu 23:19, demonstrated that all these forms are consistent in retaining the meaning “comfort,” “console,” “consolation,” or “have compassion.”<sup>92</sup> It is in the Niphal stem (and arguably the Hithpael in Nu 23:19) that the theological implications begins to diverge, and the lexical study becomes more complex and problematic (Parunak, 1975:517). This is primarily due to the Niphal stem often being used as reflexive of the Qal stem, and is frequently used with verbs that express emotions which react upon the mind, and like the Hithpael, can carry the meaning of the active with the addition of *to oneself* (GKC,137).

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<sup>91</sup> Parunak draws from the works of J. Harvey, and H. Huffmon to show that this particular *rib*-pattern is characteristic of a declaration of war from a suzerain to an unfaithful vassal.

<sup>92</sup> Although other synonyms are used in the various translations, the main meaning of “comfort,” “consolation,” or “compassion” is retained for the base meaning.

Of the forty-eight uses of the Niphal in the Old Testament, God is the subject thirty-four times and man or men the subject fourteen times. In only ten occurrences of the Niphal נִחַם is the word “repent” lacking in the 1611 KJV.<sup>93</sup> Of these ten verses, nine are translated “comfort,” and one translated “ease.” The versions used to illustrate the translation history for the Niphal נִחַם not translated as “repent” are as follows:

King James Version	1611
Douay-Rheims Version	1899
Revised Standard Version	1952
New American Bible	1970
New American Standard	1971
New Revised Standard Version	1989
New International Version	1984

The ASV and JPS were not included in the analysis as they agree with the KJV except in Isa 57:6. In both cases, the translations in the verse are close synonyms (ASV — “appeased”; JPS — “pacify”). The Catholic NAB translation deviates the most from the KJV as the translation of the Niphal נִחַם used different wording in nine verses. There was, however, no change in meaning as synonyms were used in each case.

#### Verses with the Niphal נִחַם not translated “repent” in the KJV

Verse	KJV	DRA	RSV	NAB	NASB	NRSV	NIV
Ge 24:67	comfort	moderated sorrow	comfort	Solace	comfort	comfort	comforted
Ge 38:12	comfort	comfort	comfort	completed mourning	end of mourning	end of mourning	recovered from grief
2Sa 13:39	comfort	comforted	comfort	Reconciled	comfort	console	consoled
Ps 77:2	comfort	comfort	comfort	Consoled	comfort	comfort	comforted
Isa 1:24	ease	comfort	vent wrath	get vengeance	be relieved	pour out wrath	get relief
Isa 57:6	comfort	not be angry	be appeased	not punish	relent	be appeased	relent
Jer 31:15	comfort	comforted	comfort	Consoled	comfort	comfort	comforted
Eze 14:22	comfort	comforted	console	Consoled	comfort	console	consoled
Eze 31:16	comfort	comforted	comfort	Consoled	comfort	console	consoled
Eze 32:31	comfort	comforted	comfort	Comforted	comfort	console	consoled

#### 4.4.5.1 Verses with the niphal נִחַם with man as the subject

The breakdown of the fourteen occurrences of Niphal נִחַם with man as the subject is as follows:

<sup>93</sup> The KJV continues to be the “control” version.

- Remove grief because of a death or adversity 5
- Emotion due to divine judgment 5
- Response to realisation of sin 3
- Action because of fear 1

When man is the subject, the verb usually contains more of an emotional element (TDOT, 9:349), which could be a result of human fickleness or some sinful activity that necessitates regret (TLOT, 2:738). The emotion can lead to a decision or change of action that would change a set of circumstances (Ex 13:17). When a change of action is involved, the emotion is usually shown in parallel with the verb שׁוּב “to turn” which generally describes the new action involved while נָחַם involves the emotional component.

#### 4.4.5.1.1 Remove grief because of a death or adversity

In the “Remove grief because of a death or adversity” category, all five verses (Ge 24:67; 38:12; 2Sa 13:39; Ps 77:2; Jer 31:15) relate to the human emotions involved with grief and suffering, which is generally pain that is followed by resignation and an inward peace (TDOT, 9:349). Only in Jer 31:15, is the metaphorical Rachel refusing any peace or comfort (the LXX translates “refuses to stop crying”) over the death of her children—the deportation of Northern Israel to Assyria. The refusal is not voluntary and thus selfish; it demonstrates a realization that comfort is not within the power of those who offer it (TDOT, 9:352). There is no action or “change of mind” involved with these verses (linked with the verb שׁוּב), only emotion.

#### 4.4.5.1.2 Emotion due to divine judgment

In the “Emotion due to divine judgment” category, three out of the five occurrences are three passages in Ezekiel which involve a reaction to the witnessing of God’s judgment on wicked people (14:22; 31:16; 32:31). The other two passages (Jdg 21:6, 15) involve Israel’s reaction when they realize that the tribe of Benjamin has been nearly wiped out. This small tribe was nearly annihilated because of the wickedness described in Jdg 18, and the fact that they were totally unrepentant. The nation was grieved that God’s people were now incomplete, and this disastrous situation brought into question God’s faithfulness regarding the sons of Jacob. The pain is brought about by a situation where the people believe they have no power to revive their brother (Davis, 2003:223), as well as an understanding that the near destruction of

Benjamin is a result of an outburst of God's anger (Wolf, 1992:505), and their own oath to not provide any wives to the survivors. The comfort that follows is sympathy for their brother Benjamin (אֶל־בְּנֵימִן—v. 6, לְבְנֵימִן—v. 15), which is suffering emotional pain, a change from earlier feelings of vengeance. The sympathy and comfort expressed by נחם is manifested as a desire to find a workable solution (TDOT, 9:350).

#### 4.4.5.1.3 Response to realisation of sin

When a man is said to נחם in “Response to realisation of sin” (third category) it is primarily used to describe the emotion involved when the result of sin is experienced. Three passages describe this situation (Job 42:6; Jer 8:6; 31:19). In Job 42:6, the verb נחם is parallel with נאס “despising himself,” and the LXX uses τήκω, “to melt, to dissolve” and considering oneself to be dust and ashes. Everything in the verse is about Job's emotions and feelings (where נחם is parallel with נאס “despise oneself”) with no actions indicating true repentance. The passages in Jeremiah both use the verb שׁוּב in describing repentance in parallel with נחם to describe the emotion that surrounds the repentance. In Jer 8:6, the people are described as “refusing to return” (v. 5), and the verb שׁוּב is used twice in context—once in v. 5 “the people refused to return,” and also when the prophet says the people “turn to their own way.” The people are not נחם על־רַעְתּוֹ because they have not repented. They are void of the emotion brought by repentance. Lastly, Jer 31:19 describes the repentance of Ephraim, who repents / turns (שׁוּב), and then after being instructed, metaphorically smites his thigh in an emotional outburst befitting of his נחם.

#### 4.4.5.1.4 Action because of fear

The single case of “action because of fear” is found in Ex 13:17, where God led Israel, not by the shorter and more direct route (through the land of the Philistines), but rather by the way of the Red Sea (v. 18). He did this because He knew that the Philistines would be hostile, and the threat of war on this nation of former slaves would be too much, and they would be attracted back to Egypt. While the action is what God is concerned about, the people would not just change course as a matter of strategy or will. They would react purely to their emotional fear. The threat of war with the Philistines would drive them to a sense of fear, and by this they would “comfort themselves” by changing their minds and going to Egypt.

While the circumstances involving the emotional response of נחם might be painful or sorrowful, the emotion itself reflects a settled resolve to think and act differently. The comfort that comes after the death of a loved one or personal adversity is a completion or cessation of grief. The emotion that is generated by looking on a judgment from God is either that of consolation in proper judgment inflicted on others or is found in a cessation of judgment on others and a solution for restoration (Jdg 21:6, 15). In every case where the Niphal נחם is used with man as the subject, the situation involves an emotion leading to a conviction to think or act (or the absence of such in the case of rejection of נחם) and sometimes followed by a specific course of action. This emotion is best translated “comfort.”

#### 4.4.5.2 Niphal verses with God as the subject

In all occurrences of the Piel / Pual / Hithpael stems (excluding Nu 23:19), or when man is the subject of the Niphal stem, as discussed so far, there has been little confusion or theological tension. In every case evaluated so far, the central idea of נחם is to provide comfort to others (in the Piel / Pual) or to reflexively / passively receive comfort (in the Hithpael / Niphal). The final thirty-four uses of the Niphal where God is the subject, and the Hithpael in Nu 23:19 pose a lexical challenge. Does God regret an action or repent from a decision because He is sorry? Are there second thoughts or is this an expression of pure emotion?

The breakdown of the thirty four occurrences of Niphal נחם with God as the subject is as follows:

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| • God stopping or removing judgment on his people | 19 |
| • Judgment  | 8  |
| • Emotion due to judgment (with grace)            | 4  |
| • God not changing his purpose                    | 3  |

##### 4.4.5.2.1 God stopping / removing judgment on his people

By far the largest category where God is the subject of נחם is when He removes (either by stopping or by complete removal) his judgment on his people (19X). In fifteen of these occurrences, the verb נחם is followed by the prepositional phrase beginning with  $\text{עַל־}$  or  $\text{אֶל־}$ , and is used to describe the objects which, when removed, initiate the נחם of God (Parunak, 1975:520). The prepositions  $\text{עַל־}$  and  $\text{אֶל־}$  are syntactically

interchangeable, and the use of one or the other carries no exegetical significance (Parunak, 1975:520n1).<sup>94</sup>

A chart summarising each occurrence of the Niphal נחם coupled with the על- or אל- prepositional phrase is listed below by their different objects.

**Verses with the Niphal נחם and על- or אל- by object of the prepositional phrase**

הַרְעָה		זֹאת	עֲבֹדֶיךָ
Ex 32:12	Jer 26:19	Am 7:3	Ps 90:13
Ex 32:14	Jer 42:10	Am 7:6	
2Sa 24:16	Joel 2:13		
1Ch 21:15	Jon 3:10		
Jer 18:8	Jon 4:2		
Jer 26:3			
Jer 26:13			

Out of the fifteen times that נחם is used to describe God removing judgment using a prepositional phrase, the most common object of the phrase is הַרְעָה, and is used twelve times. The pronoun זֹאת is used twice (Amos 7:3, 6) and functions as an accusative pointing to the antecedent of God’s judgment of locusts and fire (vv. 1, 4), so it provides essentially the same meaning as הַרְעָה. In the final passage (Ps 90:13), Moses pleads to God on behalf of Israel (עֲבֹדֶיךָ) to cease from his anger (vv. 7, 9, 11) because of the sin of the people (v. 8). This passage is not an indicative statement, as in the other fourteen uses of a prepositional phrase, but rather is a plea from a man who understands the severity of the judgment of the Creator.

In every case of the fifteen occurrences of נחם with the על- or אל- prepositional phrase, an appeal is made to God’s character, his covenant faithfulness, his divine character (who He is in essence), or his commands (God’s response to obedience from his covenant people).

A chart listing each use of the Hebrew נחם with God as the subject and the על- or אל- prepositional phrase along with a summary of the context is provided below.

<sup>94</sup> Joüon (1993:133b) states that these two prepositions are frequently found interchangeably in a number of OT passages. Also, in his Hebrew Grammar, Sperber (1966:58) says, “The Bible itself obviously is ignorant of any difference between ‘al and ’el and uses them indiscriminately.”

Verse	Prepositional Phrase	Context / Exegesis
Ex 32:12	עַל־הַרְעָה	God remembers his covenant
Ex 32:14	עַל־הַרְעָה	God remembers his covenant
Jdg 2:18	מִנְאֻקָּתָם	God remembers his covenant
2Sa 24:16	אֶל־הַרְעָה	In parallel with God's great mercy (2Sa 24:14)
1Ch 21:15	עַל־הַרְעָה	In parallel with God's great mercy (1Ch 21:13)
Ps 90:13	עַל־עֲבֹדֶיךָ	In parallel with God's lovingkindness (Ps 90:14)
Ps 106:45		In parallel with God's lovingkindness
Jer 18:8	עַל־הַרְעָה	In response to people's repentance / obedience
Jer 26:3	אֶל־הַרְעָה	In response to people's repentance / obedience
Jer 26:13	אֶל־הַרְעָה	In response to people's repentance / obedience
Jer 26:19	אֶל־הַרְעָה	In response to people's repentance / obedience
Jer 42:10	אֶל־הַרְעָה	In response to people's repentance / obedience
Joel 2:13	עַל־הַרְעָה	In parallel with God's lovingkindness and in response to people's repentance / obedience
Joel 2:14		In parallel with God's lovingkindness and in response to people's repentance / obedience (Joel 2:13)
Am 7:3	עַל־זֹאת	In parallel with God's forgiveness (Amos 7:4)
Am 7:6	עַל־זֹאת	In parallel with God's forgiveness (Amos 7:7)
Jon 3:9		In response to people's repentance / obedience
Jon 3:10	עַל־הַרְעָה	In response to people's repentance / obedience
Jon 4:2	עַל־הַרְעָה	In parallel with God's lovingkindness

Moses appeals to the unconditional covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 32:12, 14). David appeals to God's abundant mercies compared to the seemingly non-existent mercies of man (2Sa 24:16; 1Ch 21:15). In the book of Jeremiah, either God Himself or the prophet is speaking of a promised conditional response of removing judgment by God—provided that his people repent of their ways and turn to obedience. Reference is even made to the veracity of this promise through empirical evidence from King Hezekiah (Jer 26:19).

The prophet Joel speaks of God removing judgment because of his character—although specific national repentance is directly in view (Joel 2:13, 14). Amos is given two visions of judgment where God specifically says that He will נהם “from this,” where the pronoun points to a plague of locusts (Am 7:3) or fire (v. 6). In both cases, the prophet appeals to forgiveness. Like the situation in Ex 32, the prayer was given a temporal answer, and related only to consequences and not guilt. The prophet's prayer is one that appeals to the compassionate nature of God, asking that God would look on Jacob who is “too small” and, whether cognizant of the fact or not, is in total

dependence on God for survival. Even a small judgment would eradicate the people, and thus render God's covenant as impossible to fulfil.

The Ninevites, after receiving the preaching of Jonah and reacting to Jonah's specific warning, also responded in obedience and God was faithful to his word regarding the removal of judgment. The prophet revealed the true reason for their pardon; that **חֶסֶד** is bound up in the very nature of God, and is manifested on Jew and Gentile alike. In the remaining passage that uses the **עַל־** or **אֶל־** prepositional phrase (Ps 90:13), Moses appeals to the **חֶסֶד** of God because his fury is being felt by all people in death and shortened lifespans. Moses is asking that God turn (**שׁוּב**) from his course of destruction and provide instruction for gaining wisdom (v. 12) so that they can receive the **חֶסֶד** of God, resulting in true worship.

The remaining four passages in this category are not followed by this characteristic prepositional phrase (Joel 2:14; Jon 3:9; Jdg 2:18;<sup>95</sup> Ps 106:45). The two simplest passages (Joel 2:14 and Jon 3:9) follow the schema of Ps 90:13. In Joel 2:14, God poses a question of possibility of **נחם** (**מִי יוֹדֵעַ נחם** "who knows?") after giving a command for the people to repent (**וְשׁוּבוּ**) (v. 13). The result of God's **עַל־הֲרַעָה נחם** here is that He might leave a blessing (v. 14), which parallels the description of his character in v. 13 (gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness), which in turn is why God is comforted from doing evil (**וְנחם עַל־הֲרַעָה**).

Likewise, in its use of parallelism with a preceding or following verse, Jon 3:9 does not give an indicative statement (like the following verse where God is said to **נחם**), but rather the King of Nineveh is posing a question of possibility and hope that if God does not turn from his fierce anger (**וְשׁוּב מִחֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ**), then the people will have a chance of surviving. This phrase is in parallel with **עַל־הֲרַעָה** in v. 13.

Ps 106:45 uses **נחם** indicatively relative to God's removal of judgment on his people, and it is used for the same reason as Joel 2:13 and Jon 3:10. It is according to his own **חֶסֶד** that God is **נחם**. This **חֶסֶד** (translated "lovingkindness," or "mercy") gives the grounds why He remembers his covenant with his people.

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<sup>95</sup>Jdg 2:18 does have a true prepositional phrase **מִנְעֵאֲקֵתָם** indicating the cries of affliction from the people are what causes God's **נחם**.

The insinuation that the people's groans (מִנְאִיקָתָם) are a cause for God's נחם makes Jdg 2:18 a bit more difficult, but the context sheds the proper light on the text. In similar fashion to Ps 106:45, Jdg 2:18 is a removal of judgment because of God's remembrance of his covenant. God sent the judgment because of sin and disobedience according to v. 15 (וַיִּרְיֶהוּהָ הָיִתְּהָ בָם לְרָעָה), and then He reflexively had נחם from the evil (רעה) that He had sent by providing judges and being "with the judge."

In fourteen out of the fifteen passages where the על- or אל- prepositional phrase follows נחם, the object of the preposition is the evil which God has declared or purposed for his people. Only in Ps 90:13 is there a request by Moses for God to provide נחם to Himself because of his servants. The justification of the request is because of the character of God, specifically his חֶסֶד. The purpose for the request, however, is identical to the other fourteen uses of נחם with the על- or אל- prepositional phrase: it is a request for God to put aside his fury against his people.

In every case where God is said to נחם because of his removal of judgment, it is a result of his mercy and lovingkindness, desire to forgive, or his remembrance of an irrevocable covenant. God is not reacting to sorrowful circumstances, or expressing sorrow or regret. He is acting purely out of his character and truthful word.

Summarising the chart above, God receives comfort (נחם) when his anger or judgment is removed from his people. He reflexively provides נחם (God is both the subject and object of נחם) because He remembers his covenant (i.e., his faithfulness), because of his character (He is gracious by nature), or because of a response to a conditional promise (He is truthful). God's נחם is a change of purpose which is incidental to the circumstances at hand, and not a reaction to it, or a modification of the circumstances (TDOT, 9:345). It is an expression of his compassion, and of his commitment to his covenant and the freedom of his grace (Hubbard, 1989:207).

In the removal of judgment, God is comforted by providing grace in place of judgment. It is not God arbitrarily being motivated by outside influences or changing based on what He sees or hears, but rather, it is God providing grace based on his character. Judgment was pronounced because it was right and just – according to the character of God. Grace was provided because it also reflects the character of God.

#### 4.4.5.2.2 God executing judgment on his people

The second category in which God is the subject of the Niphal נָחַם is when God executes divine judgment. There are a total of eight occurrences in this category. In these instances, the sense is one of satisfaction because of a righteous response. God comforts Himself because of appropriate reaction to rebellion and sin.

Both Isa 1:24 and 57:6 portray God being appeased or comforted when He dispenses judgment. The KJV translates Isaiah 1:24 as “ease,” which was changed in the RSV and NRSV to “vent wrath” and “pour out wrath” respectively. The ESV returns to the KJV idea of “ease.” The LXX renders “I will not stop my wrath on my opponents.” Peels (1995:112) says there is no reason for the semantic range of נָחַם to be weakened here, and that the appropriate translation is “comfort oneself,” and is in line with the Hithpael usage of נָחַם in Ge 27:42 and Ez 5:13. God gets his comfort through enacting vengeance on his enemy.

Although Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:348) says this use of נָחַם with the preposition בְּ is problematic, he does admit the only lexical possibility here is to treat the verb reflexively, “console oneself” (at the expense of the enemy). Stoebe (TLOT:2:737) sees “...that God “comforts” Himself in relation to his enemies, i.e., He will no longer feel regret for his patience that delays punishment.” There is clearly a sense of satisfaction in providing just recompense, in which there will be no cessation of judgment. “Comfort” or “being appeased” in relation to God’s intended action is the logical translation.

In Isaiah 57:6, the KJV translates נָחַם as “comfort,” where God is asking a rhetorical question which demands the answer “no.” Sinful people are offering material sacrifices thinking that they will appease their god, all the while acting according to their own sinful desires. After providing an itemised list of their worthless sacrifices, God asks הֲעֵל אֱלֹהִים אֲנַחֵם, “Will I be comforted / appeased because of these things?” The idea of appeasement and not punishing is picked up in the DRA, ASV, JPS, RSV, and NRSV. The NAB, NASB and NIV each provide the idea of “not to punish” or “relent,” as in God asking, “Will I relent [from my judgment] because of these offerings?” Again, the idea of a satisfying comfort is in view.

There are four passages in Jeremiah in which God speaks of withholding his grace. In Jer 4:28, God purposes to invoke a partial judgment (v. 27) on Israel, and He will not be comforted by the metaphorical mourning of the earth. External pleading or groaning will not move God from his purpose. Jer 15:6 deals with a stated purpose of God as well: to inflict four types of judgment on his people. In this, even Moses and Samuel cannot intervene or provide any appeasement (v. 1). There is a sense of an objectionable excess of patience in the Niphal verb **לָאָה** (**נִלְאִיתִי הַנְּחָם**) which causes God to be weary because of “too much relenting” (TWOT, 1:464) of extending grace to the point where it must be retracted; otherwise the character of God is impugned.

The sole passage in this category that has the **עַל־** or **אֶל־** prepositional phrase following **נָחַם**, is Jer 18:10, and it is essentially the same as its counterpart (Jer 18:8) described above. The only difference is that God is withholding prosperity (**הַטּוֹבָה**) from an unrepentant people. As in v. 8, this verse is speaking to people in a covenant relationship with God, and what is being described is purely a covenantal action. In either case, God is comforted by the appropriate covenantal action.

In the fourth passage in Jeremiah that deals with withholding grace (20:16), the prophet uses **נָחַם** in an illustration that describes the messenger who gives his father the news that he has another son (Jeremiah). God’s spokesman is distraught at the disobedience of Israel and their blindness to their own destruction. His distress is even amplified over the fact that he himself has to deliver the message of judgment to Israel, which drives him to despise his own existence.

Here, Jeremiah says that the man who told of the birth of the prophet of doom is to be compared to the actual cities that God destroyed. That messenger is worthy of the same end of those cities because of the horror of his message. The prophecy is so horrific, and the message so repulsive to Jeremiah, that the messenger who heralded the birth of the prophet should be annihilated because the message of the prophet would be so bad that anyone connected to it should be destroyed. The picture Jeremiah paints about God’s destruction of the cities uses **נָחַם** in the perfect conjugations. In this context it describes a previously completed action that shows finality and certainty. God had completely destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which are a standing testimony to God’s punishment on the ungodly (Feinberg, 1986:505). What is clearly in view is the absence of compassion, not the

presence or absence of sorrow. The translation of נחם for God here would be “compassion.”

The final two passages that show God’s נחם when He executes judgment and withholds grace are Eze 24:14 and Zec 8:14. In the first passage, God speaks not only with finality, “I have spoken, it is coming, and I will act...”, but also deterministically. While eventual cleansing is the purpose (v. 13), it cannot happen until full judgment has been dispensed. God withholds present grace to ensure future grace.

In the second passage (Zec 8:14), the same idea of constraining the past or present grace compared to future grace is also in view. Israel was treated by God according to strict suzerain-vassal covenantal guidelines (Zec 8:11), which resulted in them being cursed by the nations (v. 13). The past, however, is now being reversed and Israel will become a blessing (v. 13). Again, as in Eze 24:14, נחם is being used in a descriptive sense. In the same way that God enforced covenantal judgment on an unrepentant nation, He will (in the future) provide strict enforcement of grace and blessing on that same nation because of his own actions.<sup>96</sup>

#### 4.4.5.2.3 God expresses emotion due to his judgment and grace

The third category where the Niphal נחם is used with God as the subject is that of God’s emotion due to his providing judgment and grace, and is found in four passages (Ge 6:6-7, 1Sa 15:11, 35). This category and the last category (4.4.5.2.4) are by far the most complex and difficult passages to exegete because they involve the idea of God’s passibility.

While all of these passages (the four in this category, two in the last category, and Num 23:11) were initially translated as “repent” in the KJV, ASV, and RSV,<sup>97</sup> they have been subsequently replaced by “was sorry,” “regret,” or “change of mind,” which raises a question whether the translations are moving towards language that further weakens

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<sup>96</sup> This concept of future grace (through future blessing) is found in the Hiphil verb הנהלתי in v. 12 where God causes Israel to inherit his blessings.

<sup>97</sup> The RSV is an exception here as it revised “repent” to “was sorry” in Ge 6:6-7.

the doctrine of the immutability of God.<sup>98</sup> The four passages in this category all share a common element, which is that the verb נחם is followed by a causal כִּי clause.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Genesis 6:6</b> And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:6</b> וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם</p>
<p><b>Genesis 6:7</b> for I am sorry that I have made them.</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:7</b> כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתֶם</p>
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:11</b> I regret that I have made Saul king,</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:11</b> נִחַמְתִּי כִּי־הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת־שָׂאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ</p>
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:35</b> And the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:35</b> וַיְהוּה נָחַם כִּי־הִמְלִיךְ אֶת־שָׂאוּל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל</p>

Although the Hebrew conjunction כִּי can be used in a variety of ways,<sup>99</sup> Parunak (1973:10) shows that in these four passages כִּי can only function in one of two ways.

- The first of these options is that כִּי may introduce an object clause which presupposes that נחם expresses a “speech act.”<sup>100</sup> The strengths of this option lie in the fact that two major lexicons (BDB and KB) carry this meaning as well as most of the English translations used in this study.<sup>101</sup> The preferred English translation for נחם in these texts (as shown in the various English translations) is “repent,” “regret,” or “be sorry.” So, the translation would be that “God repented / regretted / or was sorry *that* He made man.” The weakness, however, is that this meaning lessens or mischaracterises the absolute and full sovereignty and immutability of God.

<sup>98</sup> See Chapter 2, where the idea of “repent” was almost entirely viewed as anthropopathic prior to the twentieth century.

<sup>99</sup> So with all the Lexicons (HALOT, TWOT, NIDOTTE, KB, etc.).

<sup>100</sup> See HALOT, 2:471; BDB, 471; Gesenius, 1979:391; Holladay, 1988:155; GKC, 491 for this usage of כִּי. A speech act involves mental, sensational and communicative activities such as seeing, hearing, saying, knowing, believing, remembering, forgetting, rejoicing, regretting, swearing, or thinking.

<sup>101</sup> On this, Parunak (1973:11) lists KJV (AV), ASV, RSV, and NASB.

- The second option is that כִּי introduces a causal clause, and marks the reason for the resulting נחם of God. The translation here would be “since,” or “because.” In his analysis, Parunak (1973:11) determines that the causal use of כִּי is characteristic with verbs of emotional activity. This conclusion would necessitate נחם to reflect emotion, and in these passages, they would suggest an idea that “God was grieved *because...*” or “God was pained emotionally *because...*”.

In each of the four cases in this category, God is expressing an emotion based on a decision that He Himself brought about. Causal clauses marked by כִּי describe instances where God has purposed an event which will intentionally bring about pain that He Himself will also experience from that event, so that his ultimate plan (and what is deemed a greater benefit) is put into action (Parunak, 1973:12). The weakness of this view is contained in the strengths of view one. The strengths are that if the meaning “regret” or “sorrow” were the intention of the writer, then several other Hebrew idioms would have been used that add clarity.<sup>102</sup> In addition, this view “eliminates the theological denial of sovereignty implied by God regretting” (1973:12). For this reason, the proposed solution to the problem as stated in the central theoretical argument (Section 1.7) holds that the Hebrew כִּי following the Niphal נחם in these four historical texts (Ge 6:6-7; 1Sa 15:11, 35) introduces a causal clause.

There are two contexts in which Niphal נחם is used in this category. The first details God’s judgment of man through the flood, and the second is God’s judgment of Saul by removing his presence from the king of Israel. In both cases, judgment is pronounced, the act of judgment follows, and grace is given to provide continued movement toward the divine purpose. Also, in each context, there are two occurrences of Niphal נחם that contain the same expression in parallel.

Both scenarios allude to some sort of pain experienced by God which is bought about by the actions of people, and there seems to be a meaning of “suffer emotional pain.”

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<sup>102</sup> Parunak (1973:11-12) demonstrates that the word יגון, the Hebrew idiomatic phrase כִּי־יָתֵן, and the Hithpael הרה could be used to clearly express the idea of “regret.”

This has already been discussed through the idea of compassion being pains of sympathy for a sufferer.<sup>103</sup>

In Ge 6:6-7, the cause of the נחם is found in the act of the creation of man, and is also described in parallel with God being “grieved in his heart” אֶל-לְבוֹ נִתְעַצֵּב which describes an emotional or “inward” reaction. This reaction occurs before the mental activity that is the outward expression of his judgment (Snider, 2007:166). The parallel verb עצב “to be hurt, pained, grieved, angered, or outraged” is used reflexively in the Hithpael, and means “emotionally pained” through a self-inflicted action. In addition, the source of the נחם in both verses originates in v. 5: “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” It is this divine observation that brought the outrage (עצב). The pain, or grief felt by God is relieved through the judgment administered in the flood, coupled with the grace given to Noah and his family on the ark. Comfort or consolation is provided when God provides a just judgment (cf. Eze 5:13). In the same way, there is an identical sense of comfort when grace is administered and judgment is retracted (cf. Joel 2:12-14; Jon 3:10; 4:2).

The comfort (easing of tension) is shown in Gen 8:21, where Noah sacrifices to God after disembarking from the ark. Immediately after the obvious display of judgment and grace, God is described as smelling a “soothing aroma” of a sacrifice, and promises never again to punish humankind, yet He still acknowledged the total wickedness that remains in his creation. People’s hearts are still evil, yet the judgment is complete, the grace given, and there is an absence of pain. This reveals the profound meaning of נחם for God. He did not change his mind or intentions for the future of humankind, since the human race continued after the flood. He also did not change his mind about his relationship with people after the flood because the wickedness of humankind remained. Instead, He fully accepted the incorrigible nature of his creation with patience and mercy (TDOT, 9:343).

This acceptance is due to God’s eternal omniscience, which reveals that the decision to create humankind was coupled with the full knowledge that the same creation would rebel in wickedness. As God was “grieved in his heart” with what He saw, He was “comforted” in the judgment administered along with the grace extended to continue

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<sup>103</sup> See Section 4.2.1 and Parunak (1973, 526-527).

the propagation of the same creatures in the same wicked state. Without this understanding of omniscience, all references to “comfort” for the Niphal נחם would not make sense because God would obviously not be comforted in making wicked creatures who only succeeded in constantly surpassing their present wickedness (Snider, 2007:166).

But if the emotional pain (עצב) is coupled with the compassion shown to the one who is about to suffer—humankind suffering judgment—then the tension is significantly reduced. God is compassionate towards a rebellious and wicked creation, and actually sympathises with all humankind in feeling the pain that He judicially administers. The ark was given to Noah before the flood, resulting in the gracious sparing of human life. After the flood, a covenant was made by God resulting in the promise of a continuation of wicked humankind who could live without fear of further catastrophic judgment.

The second pair of verses with the כִּי clause deals with God’s rejection of Saul as king of Israel and appointment of David as the new king (1Sa 15:11, 35). In both cases, the causal clause is the making of Saul king by God.<sup>104</sup> Just as in Ge 6:6-7, the נחם of God follows a decision that He made which resulted in an action that required judgment. His נחם in the face of Saul’s unfaithfulness is motivated by Saul’s guilt, but it does not change his plans (TDOT, 9:344). There is no sorrow or regret, but a calculated action follows. This calculated action is judgment, followed by grace, the anointing of David as the new king of Israel – a king who is chosen by God Himself and who is the source of the seed of the kingly line leading to Jesus Christ. The similarities of the two contexts in which נחם occur are shown below:

Ge 6:6-7

God created humankind—perfect and good  
Humankind rebelled and fell into perpetual wickedness  
God saw the wickedness of humankind and was “grieved”  
God was “comforted”  
    God sent a flood judging the entire earth  
    God sent an ark preserving life through the flood  
    God promised never again to flood the earth

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<sup>104</sup> Note the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular in v. 11 (נַחַמְתִּי), as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular with יְהוָה as the subject in v. 35 (נָחַם)

1Sa 15:11, 35

God chose Saul as king of Israel—a good king, albeit from a sinful request

Saul rebelled and fell into wickedness

God saw the wickedness of Saul

God was “comforted”

God removed his presence from Saul and “tore” the kingdom from him

God chose and anointed David to be king over Israel

God promised that David’s kingdom (line) will endure forever

In the same way that God’s reaction to the perpetual wickedness of his special creation in Ge 6:6-7 resulted in an irrevocable promise never again to destroy the earth with water, the reaction to Saul’s rebellion paved the way for his irrevocable promise of steadfast love toward the house of David (1Sa 15:28; 2Sa 7:12, 16; Ps 132:11) (TDOT, 9:343).

In all four occurrences (2 separate scenarios) in this category, the context is God’s response to something that He Himself has purposed, followed by a definitive action of judgment, followed by an act of grace. As shown in all the other categories, when נחם is used in this combination (with God as the subject of Niphal נחם), there is never sorrowful resignation, but rather, action that brings concrete consequences (TLOT, 2:738).

Through compassion, God feels the pain which He Himself is justly administering. This love causes Him to feel the pain which his justice has imposed on sinful people, because ultimately He has to bear his own judgment to dispense forgiveness. Through the demonstration of his nature (gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, cf. Ex 34:6-7), He comforts both Himself and humankind by forgiving the sin and removing the pain (Parunak, 1975:527n1). This comfort is found in providing grace and the perpetuation of life after the flood, and is also found in providing grace to Israel in providing the perpetuation of a kingly line leading to Christ after the rejection of Saul. God’s love is demonstrated through sacrificial love, which comes through grace alone (Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8).

In both contexts, the meaning is reflexive and emotive: God is suffering emotional pain or grief, but is not without comfort. His compassion and suffering emotional pain is through “feeling” the suffering of the object of judgment. His comfort is from performing

a righteous action (executing wrath), and yet, providing grace in the midst of such action.

#### 4.4.5.2.4 God does not change his stated purpose for his people

The final category where God is the subject of the Niphal נִחַם is that of God not changing his purpose, of which there are only three verses: 1Sa 15:29 (2X); Ps 110:4; and the Hithpael in Nu 23:19. The passages in 1 Samuel and Numbers provide identical contexts, where there is an indicative statement of the fact that God does not נִחַם like a man. While the issues in the two passages are different, the principle behind both is the same: God is not like a man. Ps 110:4, in contrast, merely issues a declarative statement. All three occurrences, however, contain the negation of נִחַם with God as the subject, and share the stated outcome; that the specific judgment is final—God does not change his mind because of outside influence. He will not be comforted through a change of purpose.

In Nu 23:19, Balaam the prophet reveals to the Moabite king that whatever God has purposed for his people will come to pass. Israel's God is not fickle or capricious in regard to his word. Specifically, the reason for God's rejection of the desired curse is given in v. 21, where אָוֶן and עֲמָל are not seen in Jacob and Israel. Parunak (1973:34) notes that where these two terms are parallel, the idea is not just "trouble," but rather, wicked conduct, which indicates that if this type of action were present, then Israel would be in violation of the covenant with their God.<sup>105</sup>

Because there is an absence of covenant violation (Dt 28), the current blessing of the covenant remains. For God to curse in this instance would be to act like a human being and lie by going against his spoken word. Balaam was being offered money to go against the people of Israel, and he was straining to find a way to get God to curse them. Unlike Balaam, Israel's God will not be enticed and go against his word in order to receive a benefit. He will not experience נִחַם by retracting a blessing.

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<sup>105</sup> Note the following verses where אָוֶן and עֲמָל are in parallel (Job 4:8; 15:35; Ps 7:15; 10:7; 55:11; 90:10; Isa 10:1; 59:4; Hab 1:3). The subjects of these action are the wicked (cf. Ps 10:7; Job 15:35; Hab 1:3-4), and the acts of wickedness are what bring God's wrath (cf., Ps 10:7; 55:11; 90:9-11; Job 4:7-9; Isa 10:1).

Nu 23:19 is structured with two lines of bicolon, where אֱלֹהִים “God” is paired with כִּזַּב “to lie,” in the first line, and is parallel with בֶּן־אָדָם which is paired with the Niphal נָחַם in the second line. The idea is clear: man lies, meaning his word changes, and the son of man (strengthening again the idea of man or his progeny which could translate to “humankind” using the more comprehensive אָדָם) will also not only lie but actually have a degree of “comfort” in the change.

Unlike the parallel in Ge 6:6 (נָחַם parallel to עֲצַב), which refers to internal emotion, the parallel in this text refers to mental and rational thinking leading to volitional action. Lying is an act that results from a will or desire to deceive. The main emphasis of the context is the integrity of the spoken word. Lying and having נָחַם is contrasted with a second bicolon which emphasizes following through on one’s promises. God must fulfil his promise, because He has bound his character to his word (Allen, 1990:901).

Although he sees this as anthropopathic language, Keil (2001:776) agrees with Calvin (1999:211) that there is no sense of repentance with God, and clarifies that repentance is really pain that is experienced by the love that is extended in personally experiencing the judgment of his creation. In this case, God will not retract the blessing that was promised to Israel. He will not retract or change his word. The sense of נָחַם here can still stay within the more narrow meaning of “comfort,” “console,” or “compassion” because of the bicolon structure. A man (אִישׁ) lies to influence external factors or circumstances. God will never change his stated purpose or decree in order to react to a situation. He will never comfort Himself by changing his word or his stated purpose.

God’s declaration to Samuel about removing Saul from being king is similar to the situation found in Nu 23:19. In 1Sa 15:29, God’s behaviour is contrasted with the behaviour of a man. The Niphal נָחַם is described in parallel with the Piel שָׁקַר, which is translated “deal falsely, betray” and is used of breaking a promise or being false to a treaty or commitment (TWOT, 1:955). Unlike the bicolon structure found in Nu 23:19 where the second phrase strengthens the first, here the first phrase is explained by the second through a causal כִּי clause. In the first phrase, the two verbs (שָׁקַר and נָחַם) are acting as a *hendiadys* describing a single event, which references the direct object—the transfer of the kingdom of Israel from Saul to David (1Sa 15:28).

The indicative statement about God in v. 29 appears to correct v. 11 and v. 35, and this same contrast appears in 2Sa 7:15, “I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul whom I put away from before you.” But, rather than a correction of statements made outside the near context, this is a confirmation of v. 28, which immediately precedes the declaration (TDOT, 9:344). God will indeed tear the kingdom away from Saul and give it to David. He will not in any way be changed by pleading, prayer, or tears of repentance.

It must also be noted that this judgment is a consequence of sin, implying reprobation, and does not make room for salvation. As נחם is in the reflexive stem here, and is in parallel with שקר, the context provides a two-fold emphasis of the verb. God will not comfort Himself or make Himself feel better by changing what He has purposed. This type of activity is common to humankind, who use lies and retractions in order to increase their standing, eliminate pain, or avoid conflict. The Hebrew נחם (with the negative particle לֹא) here also means that God will not have compassion on Saul, regardless of how Saul feels. People are affected by emotions, and God will not be persuaded to go back on his word no matter how other people feel. He is bound by his word, so the judgment and consequences on Saul stands. The best meaning for נחם here is “comfort,” and is substantiated by the similarities with Nu 23:19 and Ps 110:4, which show a negated נחם in the Niphal with God as the subject (TDOT, 9:344).

The final instance where God does not change his purpose is in Ps 110:4. Here, נחם is in parallel with שבע, which means “to bind oneself with seven things,” meaning “to swear” (Holladay, 1988:359). This is exactly the opposite of Nu 23:19 (כַּזַּב – lie), and 1Sa 15:29 (שָׁקַר – deal falsely). In both of those passages, there is a comparison with נחם. Here there is a contrast with שבע, indicating a positive action by God contrasted with the negative (opposed to swearing or frustrating the object of the oath) aspects of נחם. The context is somewhat analogous to 1Sa 15:28-29 (cf. 2Sa 7:15) which speaks of the unconditional and everlasting Davidic Covenant.

In all three instances, נחם is spoken of as a selfish motive which would cause God to change his purpose. The verb is in parallel with lying and dealing falsely, and stands in contrast with swearing an oath. In each instance, if God has נחם, then He will go against his character, and in all three this type of נחם is fully negated. As well, in all three occurrences there is a promise of blessing (the Mosaic Covenant blessing in Dt 28 for Nu 23:19, the Davidic Covenant for 1Sa 15:29, and the Davidic Covenant and

per implication the New Covenant for Ps 110:4) which parallels the indicative statement that God will not exercise נחם on the issue at hand and retract the blessing.

#### 4.4.6 Summary of the uses of נחם

When all the English translations of נחם in the Piel / Pual stems are summarised, the common meaning attested by the vast majority of lexical scholars is “comfort” or “console.”<sup>106</sup> In the Hithpael, five out of the seven uses are also unquestionably “comfort,” “console,” or “appease myself.” In the Niphal stem, with a human subject, נחם takes the meaning “comfort”<sup>107</sup> nine out of fourteen uses, and with God as the subject essentially all thirty-four uses are expressed with a variety of translations, almost none of which are listed as “comfort.”

In every case of the thirty-four instances where נחם is used in the Niphal with God as the subject, the verb is used reflexively and should be taken as “comfort,” “console,” or “have compassion.” While “comfort” or “console” is the primary meaning in almost all of the cases, the forms of נחם with God as the subject might also take the meaning of “having compassion,” where the term compassion is used as a metonymy of cause for effect, showing that when God “suffers emotional pain” it is a result of feeling compassion on the suffering of the afflicted who are under his judgment (Parunak, 1975:527). Therefore, the Niphal נחם signifies to comfort oneself, and not to feel regret “so as to produce either a change of conduct or purpose,” something exemplified rather in the Piel stem (Michel, TDNT, 4:428; Stigers, 1976:100).<sup>108</sup>

While this does not settle the issue by any means, we have shown that it is possible for the Hebrew Hithpael and Niphal נחם to carry the meaning “comfort,” or “have compassion.” Parunak (1975:526) concludes that this is actually the basic meaning of the root in every stem and form, while Simian-Yofre and others allow for a much

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<sup>106</sup> See the discussion on Parunak (4.2.1) and Simian-Yofre (4.2.2).

<sup>107</sup> This conclusion is drawn from the sample translations that are listed in Appendix A.

<sup>108</sup> Michel’s findings are in agreement with the more recent Parunak (1975:515), Simian-Yofre (TDOT:9:340-355), and Stigers (1976:100). Essentially all the lexical works affirm that “comfort,” “consolation,” and “compassion” are core meanings of the Hebrew נחם, but that in the “repentance of God” texts they prefer the idea “regret” or “sorrow” – which have been shown to be influenced by three things: the wrong belief in Hellenistic influence on the Patristics in the development of the theology of the character of God, the debate on God’s impassibility and recent English Bible translations in the twentieth century, and the misguided acceptance of Arabic influence on the Hebrew root נחם.

greater variation. The next step is to perform a cursory review of the LXX usage and observe how early translators saw the meaning of the Hebrew (Hithpael and Niphal)  $\text{נחם}$  in the historical “repentance of God” texts.

## 4.5 Translation of $\text{נחם}$ in the LXX

The Septuagint (LXX) provides a valuable insight to see how the first translators of the Hebrew Bible into a Gentile language saw the meaning of Hebrew words, especially in the texts that relate to the  $\text{נחם}$  of God.

A full listing of the translations of  $\text{נחם}$  in all of its occurrences and varied Hebrew stems found in the LXX are listed in Appendix C. There are a total of eighteen different words or combination of words in the Greek LXX that represent the Hebrew  $\text{נחם}$ . The variation in the words chosen demonstrates that the early translators were not constrained by the idea that words are bound by their defined lexical meanings. This meant that the translators were not limited to choosing only the best lexical option available (Green, 2007:811). Rather, the context was determinative in interpretation. It must also be remembered that the LXX reflects various interpretive decisions by various translators.

In the subsequent discussion the focus will be on the historical texts that deal with the “repentance of God” and how  $\text{נחם}$  was understood by early Hellenistic Jews who were responsible for the Septuagint.

This section will only deal with the use of the LXX in the translation of the Hebrew Niphal  $\text{נחם}$  in historical texts. There are a total of four texts with nine occurrences of the Niphal  $\text{נחם}$  that will be evaluated (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; Nu 23:19; 1Sa 15:11, 29 [2X], 35). Essentially eight Greek words are used for the LXX translations:

Verse	Hebrew Stem	LXX	KJV	RSV	ESV
Ge 6:6	Niphal	ἐνεθυμέθη	repent	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	ἐθυμώθη	repent	was sorry	was sorry
Ex 32:12	Niphal	ἵλεως γίνομαι	repent	repent	Relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	ἰλάσθη	repent	repent	Relent
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	ἀπειλείν	repent	repent	change of mind
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	παρακαλεῖν	repent	repent	Regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	μετανοεῖν	repent	repent	Regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	μετανοεῖν	repent	repent	Regret
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	repent	Regret

### 4.5.1 Genesis 6:6-7

In Ge 6:6-7, the two verbs used by the LXX are ἐνθυμεῖν and θυμεῖν. The former carries a meaning of “to reflect” or “to consider,” and the latter “to become angry” (BAGD, 266, 365). What is significant to note is that in Ge 6:6, the LXX not only uses ἐνθυμεῖν to translate the reflexive נחמ, but also used a synonym, διανοεῖν “consider” (BAGD, 186) to translate the phrase וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹ, which is also an expression of emotion. In Ge 6:6, the LXX focuses on the act of judgment that is directed towards the wickedness of mankind, and does not provide any insight into the emotions.

However, in Ge. 6:7 the LXX uses the word θυμεῖν “to become angry,” and is an expression of emotion. The cause of God’s anger comes from the ὅτι clause “that / because He made man,” which could act either as an object clause or causal clause. Either way, the idea of θυμεῖν in the LXX does not indicate any sense of sorrow or regret. Like the ἐνθυμεῖν of Ge 6:6, it points to the subsequent action of the flood, which would appease God’s sense of justice.

### 4.5.2 Exodus 32:12-14

In Exodus 32:12, 14, two similar verbal phrases are used. The first phrase is ἵλεως γενοῦ “become merciful” and the second is ἱλάσθαι “to propitiate” (BAGD, 375-376). The adjective ἵλεως of v. 12 and the verb ἱλάσκεσθαι of v. 14 are related, and the use of the aorist passive has the significance that God alone allowed Himself to be merciful (TDNT, 3:314).

Although ἐξιλάσκεσθαι is the common word used to translate the idea of כפר in the LXX, usage by Philo shows that the word does carry the meaning of expiation, propitiation, and atonement. When ἐξιλάσκεσθαι is used in the LXX for כפר, it commonly refers to the action of the priest as he nullifies or expiates sin before God, where ἱλάσκεσθαι has God as the subject and man or sin as the dative object (Herrmann & Büchsel, TDNT:3:315). It is significant that Moses in no way contributed to the expiation of the sins of the people, and he did not earn or cause the grace and mercy of God to be manifested.

God is to “be propitiated” or “satisfied,” but how? The verb is an aorist passive. The translators of the LXX must have seen clearly the imperative request by Moses in v. 13, “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself...” It is God’s very name, through his word confirmed by an oath that not only allows, but demands that He be propitiated. Here, God is both subject and indirect object of the propitiation.

### 4.5.3 Numbers 23:19

The context of Numbers 23 is that Balaam is seeking to find some way to get God to curse (threaten or warn) his people. The verb ἀπειλεῖν used for the Hebrew Niphal ׀ַחַן means “to threaten” or “to warn” (BAGD, 83), and in Nu 23:19 is used in juxtaposition with lying. Here the LXX describes the literal action with no emotional component: that God does not act like a man who will threaten or warn people for a price. He is not like a man who frivolously retracts his word. God is comforted by his own covenant, his word, and his character.

### 4.5.4 1 Samuel 15:11, 29 (2X), 35

It is interesting to note that 1Sa 15:11 uses the Greek παρακαλεῖν for the Hebrew Niphal ׀ַחַן in this “repentance of God” text. This is by far the most predominant choice used by the LXX translators, with sixty-three uses of the Niphal ׀ַחַן translated with the Greek παρακαλεῖν. The root word means “to call to one’s side,” “to appeal, beseech,” “to request,” “to exhort,” and “to comfort” (BAGD, 617; Schmitz & Stählin, TDNT:5:773). The primary meaning for παρακαλεῖν when used for ׀ַחַן in the LXX is “to comfort.”<sup>109</sup>

1Sa 15:11 shares a similar construction to Ge 6:6-7 and 1Sa 15:35 in that the Niphal ׀ַחַן is followed by a ׀ַיְ clause. This construction with the verb ׀ַחַן has been shown to refer to emotional rather than mental activity.<sup>110</sup> While we cannot be certain as to the translators’ intentions, it is clear that God is reflexively<sup>111</sup> παρακαλεῖν when He carries out his purpose of judgment (1Sa 15:11).

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<sup>109</sup> See Appendix B (cf. TDNT, 5:777).

<sup>110</sup> See Section 4.4.5.2.3.

<sup>111</sup> The verb παρακαλεῖν is in the perfect middle tense.

The two occurrences of μετανοεῖν by God in 1Sa 15:29 describe God as not changing or repenting from his prescribed purpose. The verb μετανοεῖν means “a change of mind, remorse, to repent” (BAGD, 513). This verse is a close parallel to Nu 23:19 where God is said to not be like a man who lies or changes his mind. Parunak (1973:16) describes this as a metonymy of effect, which emphasises the result of man’s “change of mind.” The μετανοεῖν by God is actually comforting Himself by withholding the declared action.<sup>112</sup>

The more difficult occurrence is 1Sa 15:35, which uses the Greek μεταμέλεσθαι. Where μετανοεῖν implies that someone has arrived at a different view or a change of mind, μεταμέλεσθαι is a synonym that carries the same meaning but also expresses the emotion that accompanies the change (Michel, TDNT:4:626; BAGD, 511). In this way, the two verbs (μετανοεῖν, μεταμέλεσθαι) are related. In this text, God’s μεταμέλεσθαι is juxtaposed to Samuel’s grief and mourning. This emotion by God stands in contradiction to his not expressing μετανοεῖν “like a man” in 1Sa 15:29. The change that is taking place is the anointing and inaugurating of David as the new king of Israel – a man of God’s own choosing without input from the nation, as opposed to his providing Saul, the king who was the answer to their sinful request. God will not change his plan for Israel based on the resultant actions of a sinful people. He does, however, express emotion whenever grace is given (David) in the midst of judgment (Saul).

In summary, the LXX portrays the resultant action, and does not describe emotion. There is no regret, sorrow, repentance, or change of heart, reflecting the anti-anthropopathic tendencies of the LXX translators. This confirms the observations in Section 2.2 about anthropomorphic tendencies in the LXX. The verb choices of the LXX are clear; God is to initiate action that will bring propitiation and grace. Naturally, as reflected in the Hebrew נחם, this can be brought about by compassion, and its resultant comfort.

## 4.6 Summary of the lexical study of נחם

The idea of “comfort” and “compassion” dominates the usage of the Hebrew נחם. The Piel and Pual stems exclusively carry the meaning “comfort,” sometimes providing the

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<sup>112</sup> See Michel (TDNT, 4:626-629) for this idea with μεταμέλεσθαι.

idea of “consolation” when a death is involved. The use of both “comfort” and “compassion” is more fully developed in the Hithpael and Niphal stems.

The relationship between the cognates 𐎠𐎢𐎩 and 𐎢 in Akkadian also affirms that “be comforted” or “to comfort oneself” may be the earliest meanings. This is confirmed by the idea of “console” in Ugaritic, as well as the Syriac use of παρακαλεῖν, which is the more frequent choice of the Greek translation of 𐎠𐎢𐎩 in the LXX.

In the more difficult passages that use the Niphal 𐎠𐎢𐎩 with God as the subject, there is an emotional component expressed with comforting oneself that happens through the demonstration of compassion for another person who is suffering. The Niphal is also used in the reflexive sense, and not the passive, expressing a sense of comfort or relief.

The LXX favours παρακαλεῖν as the primary translation, and only uses μετανοεῖν and μεταμέλεσθαι to indicate a change of mind. In those instances, it is generally in a context of a conditional statement regarding the execution or holding back of impending judgment. The “repentance of God” passages in the historical texts of the Old Testament all use different words that relate to the action at hand, with the exception of 1Sa 15:29 that uses μετανοεῖν, and this in a negative sense that God will not μετανοεῖν like a man. The translation of 𐎠𐎢𐎩 in the LXX confirms the anti-anthropomorphic tendencies in the LXX, and thus has only limited value for the present study.

When the etymology, lexical study, and analysis of LXX comparisons of 𐎠𐎢𐎩 combined with the biblical-theological understanding of the theme of the Old Testament as “grace within judgment,” the word in these contexts are preferred to be understood as “comfort,” “consolation,” or “compassion.” But, these conclusions are still provisional as they must be tested in the four historical texts in exegetical analysis in Chapter 5.

A lexical study alone is not sufficient in providing an acceptable interpretation of these passages. The four historical texts must now be examined (Chapter 5) through the lens of the theme of “grace within judgment” along with the lexical conclusions just developed to explore whether the central theoretical argument is viable.

## Chapter 5

# Exegetical analysis of God's נחם in four Old Testament historical texts

This chapter will comprise an exegetical analysis of four Old Testament historical texts, where God is the subject of נחם in the Niphal. These passages were selected because they are considered as *cruces interpretum* in the debate about God's impassibility in Chapter 2. They specifically refer to God who seemingly altered his decisions.

- The **first** text is Ge 6:6-7. The questions posed by the idea of God's repentance are nowhere more clearly or poignantly highlighted than in Ge 6:6-7. In this passage, most translations employ two problematic words used for the Niphal Hebrew נחם – “repent” and “sorry.” In addition, this passage also is one of two passages (the other being 1Sa 15:11) that describe God's “sorrow,” “regret,” or “repentance” over *a past act already done* by the Divine.
- A **second** text is Moses' intercessory prayer in Ex 32:12-14.
- The **third** problematic text is 1Sa 15:11, 35. In a sense, 1Sa 15:35 is a duplicate of 1Sa 15:11. These two texts are treated together for the purpose of illustrating the argument.
- As contrast to the first three texts, a **fourth** text (Nu 23:19) will be briefly discussed, which states that God does not נחם. As is the case in 1Sa 15:29, this fourth text seems to be contradictory to the notion that God does נחם.

In each case, all the relevant context and various syntactical observations will be analysed, combined with insights from Biblical Theology (Chapter 3) and lexical work (Chapter 4).

### 5.1 Genesis 6:5-9

Ge 6:5-9 is the first divine repentance passage. The first two verses in the pericope (vv. 6-7) mark the second and third uses of the Hebrew נחם in the biblical text, and the first usage where God (Yahweh) is the subject. Both occurrences of the verb נחם in Ge 6:6-7 are in the passive / reflexive Niphal stem. The first usage of נחם in Scripture is in a related text (Ge 5:29), and will be discussed in Section 5.1.1.2.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Genesis 6:6-7</b>  <sup>6</sup> And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:6-7</b>  <sup>6</sup> וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ  וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֱלֹהִים לִבּוֹ: <sup>7</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲמַחֶה  אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה  מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם  כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתִם:</p>

### 5.1.1 Background of the flood

The judgment pronounced by God on the world in Ge 6:6-7 is subsequent to a short pericope describing an account of the proliferation of the human race (albeit somewhat awkward unclear with the introduction of the “Nephilim”) and God’s careful deliberation of the growth in mankind’s capacity for evil. God’s glorious creation in chapters 1-2, complete with order and purpose for mankind, is followed by a tragic fall from grace; yet God’s plan will not be deterred. The inaugural couple, while expelled from God’s garden, proceeded to populate the earth. Ge 4 shows that despite problems, civilization flourishes. God’s plan of an earth filled with worshippers is now derailed, even though his statement of “filling the earth” by the ongoing procreation of mankind is happening. Even Ge 5 demonstrates unusually long lifespans with a few footnotes about godly men who revered their Creator. And then, after the first four verses in Ge 6 describes disobedience in the area of marriage and procreation, suddenly God’s patience is exhausted. How is it possible to go from creation to destruction so quickly, followed by exponential population growth immediately after the flood?

The flood account is a powerful picture of the heart of God, as it relates to the sin that has been released into his creation in Ge 3 onwards. His heart appears divided; anger and hatred of sin are juxtaposed with compassion for his creation. What could have produced such a reaction?

Sailhamer (1990:79-80) defines the flood account as a “carefully wrought and intricately complex” narrative, and sees the direct cause of the flood being the fall of man in Ge 3, and his having the knowledge of good and evil. Leupold (1970:260) ties it to the indifference of the Sethites to their heritage, and the high-handed violence of the Cainites. Either way, the narrative sets a bitter contrast between God’s story of

perfect creation and his planned utter devastation (Kidner, 1973:85), and the actual direct cause of God's judgment is because of the evil that God saw in Ge 6:5.

#### **5.1.1.1 Genesis 4-5: contrasting genealogical lines**

After the first couple was banished from the Garden of Eden and the tree of life, Ge 4 details the first birth, the first sacrifice, God dealing with his fallen creation like a father who disciplines his son (Ge 4:6-7 cf. Heb 12:7), the first murder, and the growth of society. It should be noted that after the first sin in the garden, Adam was given the ability to cultivate the ground outside the garden (Ge 3:23). After the murder of Abel, Cain was cursed "from the ground," (Ge 4:11-12) making it much more difficult specifically for Cain to cultivate the ground. Even with this curse, mankind increased in productivity. Cain was able to have a family, and his progeny built up a prosperous and industrious society.

Ge 4 fits neatly within the literary strategy of Genesis, and more specifically in the first *toledoth* section in Ge 2:4-4:26 (Cassuto, 1972a:185-193; Wenham, 1987:96-100; and Mathews, 1996:259-261). The chapter begins and ends with worship of Yahweh.

The genealogy in Ge 5 as a whole stands in contrast with the preceding genealogy in Ge 4. It is helpful to see that comparisons can be made between the lines of Cain and the lines of Seth. While the text never makes an explicit comparison, the two accounts are juxtaposed, and there are some significant observations to be made. In his comparison of the two lines, Walton (2001:283-289) is not convinced that the point of the text is comparing a wicked line with a godly line. This logic seems sound, considering the indictment by God in Ge 6:5 about the complete pervasiveness of sin. Only Enoch was taken by God,<sup>113</sup> and Noah, who was commended for his righteousness was still considered to be wicked (Ge 8:21, cf., 9:21-23).

It is clear that both lines of people suffered the penetration and permeation of sin in their representative members. Both lines have ten names listed. Both lines experience blessing and death. There is also a similarity in the lines in that two key names are found in both lines: Enoch and Lamech.

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<sup>113</sup> Most English Bible versions translate the Hebrew word וַיִּחַד "and he was not." The GB translates "and he was no more seen" and the NET uses the phrase "then he disappeared."

The first Enoch (Ge 4:17-18) was the son of Cain, who built a city and named it after his son. The second Enoch (Ge 5:18-24), walked with God, and was taken to heaven. The first Lamech (Ge 4:18-24) was a polygamist and a brawler. The second Lamech was a prophet.<sup>114</sup> When looking at the emphasis of these two pairs of identical names, the Enoch-Lamech progeny of Cain pioneered cities and the arts, while the Enoch-Lamech progeny of Seth were pioneers of worship<sup>115</sup> (Matthews, 1996:291-292). Since both lines died, and both lines prospered it cannot be said that one line is godly and one line is reprobate, considering the sparse evidence of Ge 4:26 and 5:24, as well as the condemnation by God in Ge 6:5 and his confirmation of the overall human condition in Ge 8:21. Even Noah, who also “walked with God” like his grandfather Enoch, did not get translated, but rather, after a brief episode of drunkenness, lived out his days and died like all men (Ge 6:9; 9:20-24, 29).

On the question of the purpose of the juxtaposition of the two lines, perhaps Walton (2001:284) provides the best insight, concluding that Ge 4-5 are provided to track the blessing and the curse given in Ge 3:15. People are fruitful and multiply generation after generation, yet at the same time, the counter theme resounds, “and he died.” Given that the theme of the Old Testament is “grace within judgment,”<sup>116</sup> and the fact that both lines exemplify aspects of judgment and grace, this view seems quite tenable. The line of Seth is a line that points to blessing, eventually fulfilled in the Messiah, and demonstrates that hope for mankind is found in looking forward to that blessing in the midst of the judgment of death and suffering. Walking with God (repeated twice for Enoch [Ge 5:22, 24] and once for Noah [Ge 6:9]) is what enables one to experience the blessing, which is in all cases, by grace.

The *toledoth* of Adam (Ge 5:1-6:8) ignores not only his first two sons, but also other “sons and daughters” (Ge 5:4) of Adam. It picks up with the line of Seth, detailed at the end of Ge 4, noting a return to worship. The genealogy continues until Noah, the last antediluvian, who is also the first person recorded to be born after the death of

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<sup>114</sup> Lamech was a prophet in that he spoke a direct prophecy about his son, Noah. He said, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed.” (Ge. 5:29)

<sup>115</sup> Mathews (1996:268, 292) notes that Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice, and the naming of Enosh inspired men to “call upon the name of the LORD.”

<sup>116</sup> The theme of “grace within judgment” is discussed in Chapter 3 and follows Walter Kaiser’s and James Hamilton’s methodological approach.

Adam. In essence, this *toledoth* could be described as the story of the old pre-flood world, and begins with the creation of Adam, traces the multiplication of his descendents, and concludes with the announcement of total annihilation (Wenham, 1987:145). The key, oft-repeated phrase “and he died” (וַיָּמָוּת) in this section is reminiscent of the curse pronounced by God in Ge 2-3.

It is only Enoch, the seventh from Adam (cf. Jude 14) who did not experience the tragic transformation back to dust. Sailhamer (1990:73-74) rightly notes that Enoch is not central merely because he did not die. The author’s purpose is better seen in the repetition “he walked with God,” which is also used with Noah. Enoch is the man who found life in the midst of death, which means in God’s plan, death is not the last pronouncement.

Enoch did this, not by effort, but because he did what was expected from the beginning: “he walked with God” (Ge 5:24). The verb *יִתְהַלֵּךְ* is in the reflexive Hithpael, which indicates the service of a loyal servant, and suggests an intimacy by “walking with” rather than “walking before”<sup>117</sup> (Hamilton, 1990:258). His translation to heaven without death<sup>118</sup> (Ge 5:24 cf. Heb 11:5) is a beacon of light and hope in a rather dismal downward spiral of history. This is a major focus of attention for the seventh from Adam, in the same way the Cainite Lamech (the seventh from Adam in his line) was the focus of the narrative in Ge 4 (Walton, 2001:279). While Lamech boasted of his superiority in this earthly life, the shortened life of Enoch is actually regarded as a blessing or reward, and is a picture that foreshadows a continuation of life beyond the grave (Wenham, 1987:145). It is this picture of hope and instruction “he walked with God” that commands the focus in this narrative.

After the introduction and the naming of Noah (Ge 5:28-29), the genealogy is closed with the narrative of the “sons of God” and “daughters of men,” followed by the soliloquy of God and his reasons for the radical undoing of his creative acts (Mathews, 1996:344), which in turn propels the Sethite line to the next *toledoth* narrative, found in Ge 6:9 (1996:318).

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<sup>117</sup> Hamilton translates the particle *אִתּוֹ* as the more infrequent preposition “with” rather than the direct object marker.

<sup>118</sup> Cassuto (1972a: 284-285) wrongly sees the phrase “he was not” as kindly referring to death, and that his death was not like that of other people. The author of Hebrews, however, provides the final commentary in Heb 11:5.

### 5.1.1.2 Genesis 5:28-29: The naming of Noah

The naming of Noah by his father, Lamech is exegetically significant. Throughout Ge 5, in the flow of the narrative, usually right after each son is described the text reads “and became the father of...” followed by the name of the son. In Ge 5:28, the flow of the narrative is broken, and the text reads “and became the father of a son.” This is followed up by a brief, but important description of not only the son, but his name as well. What is important for this study is the use of the Hebrew נחם in describing Lamech’s son, as well as the relationship between the Hebrew נחם and the son’s name – “Noah.”

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Genesis 5:28-29</b>  <sup>28</sup> And Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and became the father of a son. <sup>29</sup> Now he called his name Noah, saying, "This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed."</p>	<p><b>Genesis 5:28-29</b>  <sup>28</sup> וַיְחִי-לְמֶֹךָ שְׁתַּיִם וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וּמָֹאֵת שָׁנָה          וַיּוֹלֵֹד בֶּן׃ <sup>29</sup> וַיִּקְרָא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה          יִנְחַמֵּנוּ מִמְּעֹשֵֹׂנוּ וּמִעֲצָבֹֹן יְדֵינוּ יְדֵינוּ          מִן-הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה׃</p>

As stated earlier in the prior section, the first observation regarding the entirety of chapter 5 is the emphatic “and he died” as a final testament to each of the ten names except Enoch. A second observation is that the line from Adam (through Seth) to Noah begins and ends with a personal naming of the son. Adam “named” Seth, and Lamech “named” Noah, making it undeniable that both are the original fathers and not a remote ancestor of the child. A third observation relative to v. 28 is the departure from the expression used throughout the chapter for each of the first nine members of the genealogy. In every case, the introduction begins with וַיּוֹלֵֹד followed by the direct object marker אֶת, which introduces the name of the son. Seth begot Enosh, Enosh begot Kenan, etc.. In v. 28, the Hebrew text leaves out the name and states, “he begot a son” (וַיּוֹלֵֹד בֶּן)

Out of the entire ten-member list in the Sethite genealogy of chapter 5, Lamech is the only member to explain the meaning of his son’s name. However, the names of both Seth and Enosh (Ge 4:26) allude to the name of Lamech’s son, Noah in Ge 5:29. When Eve named Seth (Ge 4:25), there could be a connection to Eve attributing this

birth to the grace of God,<sup>119</sup> “‘Seth’ (šēṭ) is related by sound (if not etymology) to ‘granted’ (šāt)” (Mathews, 1996:290). If this is true, then this hope also continues with the birth of Enosh (Ge 4:26a).

The Hebrew word אֱנוֹשׁ “Enosh” functions both as a common noun and synonym for “man,” and also as a name of a person. It is most probably a derivation of אָנַשׁ “to be incurably sick,” (TWOT, 1:136), and the basic emphasis is on man's weakness or mortality. The name Enosh, then, reflects a change of mind of the proud and self-reliant family of Cain. It is the man who's name gives evidence of weakness and mortality that begins to “call on the name of the Lord.”

With Enosh also being a common noun used for “mankind” in the same way as Adam, then Enosh heads a new line that will receive the blessing and survive the oncoming flood. It could be that Seth gave this name reflecting his own sense of mortality in seeing the death and violence that surrounded him (Mathews, 1996:290). Either way, this pronouncement of Enosh introduces the *toledoth* of Adam-Seth in Ge 5. It is the “calling on the name of the Lord” that is interpolated between the naming of Seth by Eve in Ge 4:26 with that of his father Adam in Ge 5:3. Despite some exegetical questions noted in v. 26b,<sup>120</sup> the question is raised by Mathews: “Is it coincidental that the next utterance of the name “LORD” in the text is Lamech's prayer concerning Noah's birth and role (5:29)?” (1996:292).

Cassuto (1972a:289), following this idea, sees this wordplay on Noah throughout the entire flood narrative: “But Noah found favour [חֵן *hēn*] (vi 8); and the ark came to rest [וַתָּנַח *wattānah*] (viii 4); resting place [מְנוּחָה *mānōah*] for the sole of her foot (viii 9); the pleasing [נִיחֹהָ *nīhōah*] odour (viii 21); a slight assonance suffices.”

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<sup>119</sup> A similar argument is made on Ge 4:1 where the translation could be, “I have acquired a man — the LORD.” The problem lies in whether the direct object marker אֶת should be translated “with.” If it is left to its more normal rendering, then Eve is hoping her son is the promised seed. If it is translated “with,” then she is acknowledging Yahweh's assistance in delivering a child despite the curse given in Ge 3.

<sup>120</sup> Mathews (1996, 292:n333-339) notes the differences between Jews who preferred the LXX, who viewed Enosh as a “righteous hero,” and the Jewish Targums, which reflect Enosh as “polluting” the name of the LORD by using the Qal / Piel form of הִלָּחַל “pollute” rather than the Hofal “began” and thus ascribe to him the paradigm of moral degradation preceding and precipitating the flood. Luther interprets v. 26b as referring to Jesus Christ, and so Enosh exhorted people toward their ultimate redemption. Outside of the Jewish Targums, the overwhelming support is for Enosh to be presented as someone who turns toward godliness.

While the etymological relationship might be in question,<sup>121</sup> נַח and נַחֵם are meant to be closely related in meaning. Unlike Westermann and the translators of the LXX, who are uncomfortable with the etymological relationship, the authors of the MT intentionally passed over the obvious etymological relationship between נַח “Noah” and נַחֵם “rest” to create a theological relationship between נַח “Noah” and נַחֵם “comfort,” two words with similar assonance, making a perfectly permissible pun (Leupold, 1970:245), a common Hebrew practice.

The words “rest” (Hebrew root נַחֵם) and “comfort” (Hebrew root נַחֵם) are not that distant in meaning (Mathews, 1996:317), and are found in parallel in Eze 5:13.<sup>122</sup>

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Ezekiel 5:13</b>            'Thus My anger will be spent,  <u>and I will satisfy</u> My wrath on them,            and <u>I shall be appeased</u>;            then they will know            that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal            when I have spent My wrath upon them.</p>	<p><b>Ezekiel 5:13</b>            וְכָלָה אִפִּי            וְהִנְחֹתִי חַמְתִּי בָם            וְהִנְחַמְתִּי            וְיָדְעוּ            כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּרְתִּי בְקִנְאָתִי            בְּכַלּוֹתִי חַמְתִּי בָם:</p>

The Hiphil נַחֵם translated “satisfy” and Hithpael נַחֵם translated “be appeased,” show a close relationship. Hamilton (1990:259) translates it, “I will assuage (*wah<sup>a</sup>niḥôṭî*) my fury against them, and get satisfaction (*w<sup>e</sup>hinneḥām<sup>tt</sup>*)”, and he goes on to say that the parallels indicate that the words are not connected merely by fanciful etymology.

For Lamech, the name of his son carries simultaneous meanings of “rest / relief” and “comfort” (Mathews, 1996:317). This use of wordplay in Ge 5:29 is further described by Wenham (1987:128-129):

*As is often the case in the OT, the etymology is not scientific; it is simply associated with the name because of its similar sound. Here “He will bring us relief,” יִנַּחֵנוּ, echoes the נַח of Noah (the final vowel û is akin to ô in Noah) and rhymes with the next Hebrew word, מִיַּדֵּנוּ “from our work,” and, more loosely, with “our hands.” The terms for “rest,” “relief /*

<sup>121</sup> Many commentators and scholars see no real etymological connection, although it has been shown that there is strong association between root words that share consonants. Essentially all agree on the strong theological connection between the Hebrew words, so there is no real conflict.

<sup>122</sup> See Chapter 4 — Lexical Analysis of נַחֵם.

*repentance,” “work / making ark,” “the land,” נח, נחם, עשה, ארץ, are all important in the next few chapters and are associated with Noah’s mission.*

Not only is there assonance between the name of Lamech’s son and his mission (נח and נחם), but there is also a connection between the comfort and the source of the comfort (from the work of our hands). There is a strong contextual connection between the naming of Noah and the curse pronounced in Ge 3:15-17.

The verb עֲצַב, is repeated in the curse of Ge 3:16-17. Both the woman (through childbearing) and the man (through working the field) will have a newfound experience – עֲצַב “pain / toil.” The obvious allusion to Ge 3:17<sup>123</sup> could be a strong indication that Lamech treasured the promise of Ge 3:15 (Kidner, 1973:81), as there is no other subject (that of dealing with mortality) that spurs such high hopes. With the conclusion that Lamech’s words of מַעֲשֵׂה “work” and עֲצָבוֹן “toil” in Ge 5:29 point back to the curse given by God in Ge 3:17, then the question remains, “What exactly is the rest?”

Von Rad (1972:72), Hamilton (1990:259) and Mathews (1996:318) all pose the question, and while both von Rad and Hamilton leave the answer open, Mathews demonstrates grammatical support for the rest being the perpetuation of the Sethite lineage until ultimate propitiation by God. Skinner (1976:133) sees the rest as not pointing to the flood, but rather, to Noah’s discovery of the “vine culture.” In agreement with Skinner, Kissling (2004:257) remarks that the vineyard in Ge 9 is then taken as a sign of a removal of the curses on the ground because although what is produced is not essential, it is pleasurable. In keeping with his tradition-critical view, Westermann (1984:360) also sees Lamech’s words as necessarily relating to the beginning of viticulture (Ge 9:20-27) and not looking back to the curse of Ge 3:15-17. Sarna (1989:44) intimates that the passage is influenced by a tradition that regards Noah as a cultural hero, who initiates true agriculture, and is the first person to discover the “soothing, consoling, and enlivening effects of wine.”

Such an interpretation, however, misses the upcoming “greater things that came from God through Noah.” The emphasis here is that prophecy does not glorify human prowess or achievement, and that any focus on Noah’s personal achievement as the

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<sup>123</sup> Also, see Skinner (1976:133), Driver (1904:77-78), and Mathews (1996: 317, 317n64).

source of comfort brought to mankind will misconstrue the meaning and spirit of the passage.

The argument for viticulture being the “relief” rests on the fact the flood did not alleviate, but rather accelerated death in Noah’s generation. The production of wine is seen as bringing some merriment in the midst of the misery of the soil’s toil, while providing a beneficial commodity for humanity (e.g., Jdg 9:13; Ps 104:15; Pr 31:6-7) (Mathews, 1996:318n68). This solution depends on two factors. The first demands an immediate solution to a temporal problem (working the earth), and does not relate this passage directly to the curse and consequences of sin (death and alienation from God). The second factor is that this view takes the phrase מִן־הָאֲדָמָה “from the ground” as being the source of the comfort, “This one will provide us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands, **out of the very soil** which the LORD placed under a curse” (Sarna, 1989:44).

The man and woman, however, never return to Eden, and despite the new promise by God in Ge 8:21, there is still toil and difficulty in extracting the produce of the ground. It is the waters of the flood that are prevented from ever again covering the earth through God’s promise of seasonal regularity. Since the curse has not been removed or even suspended, the prepositional phrase מִן־הָאֲדָמָה must mean the source of the עֲצָבוֹן “painful toil” as opposed to the source of the נַחֵם “comfort” (Mathews, 1996:318).

While some say that Lamech’s prophecy missed the mark,<sup>124</sup> it is better to see Lamech’s hope residing in God’s grace on Noah, and looking forward with a prophetic presentiment to a time devoid of misery, corruption, and violence, when all would be redeemed from the curse (Keil, 2001:80). Brueggemann (1982:70) translates the verb נַחֵם “comfort” rather than “relief” because it points to Noah to end the banishment of Adam and Eve, as well as Cain. Kidner (1973:81-82) draws the line even further, and sees a birth as the highest plane of prophecy, pointing to the birth of the Saviour, and calls the anticipation of Noah by his father a “gospel announcement.”

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<sup>124</sup> Kissling (2004:257) states that Lamech’s prophecy is not true in any ordinary sense, because in Noah’s time there was the greatest manifestation of the curse possible, the flood. Luther (1958:125) calls it a “godly mistake.” While Keil (2001:80) does see Lamech’s prophecy as actuated in the future, he intimates that it was realised “not in the way he desired.”

Lamech was not really looking for a cessation of labour to produce food. He was not looking for an efficiency expert or agricultural engineer to improve his lifestyle. Certainly Lamech's yearning for a redeemer was fomented by his predecessors. Here is the first statement in Scripture where the human race is experiencing agonising pain and longing for relief (Hartley, 2008:92). When Lamech was fifty six years old, he saw the death of Adam, and in another fifty seven years when he was one hundred and thirteen, he witnessed the translation of Enoch – not to mention Enoch's unique lifestyle of "walking with God." It is this awareness, along with the stories of Eden that were in his mind.

Seeing the death of the original first human from aging,<sup>125</sup> and the translation of Enoch, Lamech had to anticipate forthcoming relief, and the birth of Noah was undoubtedly the occasion for his prophetic statement. With this understanding, it is clear that emphasis on the lessening of the difficulty of work by improved farming methods or a more enjoyable product (viticulture) is an inadequate interpretation. In the light of this context, the prophecy of Lamech can be understood to point forward to a new beginning, in which God will ultimately remove the curse from the earth (Stigers, 1976:96-97).

Since the text intimates that all the antediluvian people were living very long lives (and, conceivably most if not all could still be alive), the naming of Noah is framed within the effects of the initial Garden setting. Lamech's reference to the toil and pain of working the ground reflects the verdict of God's judgment on the earth, and the fact that the extraction of food will take great effort.

But at the same time, the antediluvians knew just as well about the promise (Ge 3:15) of a time when redemption would come. Lamech's yearning for a redeemer not only looks back to the failure in the Garden, but also anticipates the sin and judgment of Noah's day (Ge 6:5-7) where the same wording appears. The three words נחם, עשה, and עצב are found here in Ge 5:29 and 6:6. While עצב "toil" points back to the curse in the garden, the idea of עשה "work" is both pre-curse and post curse. The connection with Noah, the rest-bearer, points forward to Ge 6:6 with נחם and not back to the garden. The roots עשה and עצב are substantive here with the verbal forms being used

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<sup>125</sup> Scripture is not explicit on the nature of Adam's death. Outside of the murder of Abel by Cain, there is no mention of death in Ge 4 or the means of death in Ge 5.

in Ge 6:6. The use of identical roots (נחם, עשה, and עזב) here and in Ge 6:6 show that Lamech looks ahead to victory (Ge 3:15) from the depth and breadth of total depravity and wickedness spawned by the first act of disobedience in the Garden (Mathews, 1996:317-318).

The personal pronoun “us” (“he will comfort *us*”) as the direct object must refer in a general sense to the whole Sethite line, if not the population of the world from Lamech’s perspective. The name “Noah” given by his father, and the specific prophecy of comfort refers to some unspecified future role for Noah. While prosperity and fruitfulness do abound after the flood, the name “Noah” here does not signify the agency of change, but merely the destined medium of blessing (Bush, 1976b:115). These events, however, are still ultimately brought by Yahweh and not Noah, the man who ultimately is the instrument of God’s salvation of the human family (Mathews, 1996:318).

The naming of Noah by his father is a critical foundation for the biblical reader to develop an accurate and consistent meaning for the Hebrew נחם in Ge 6:5-7. The words “rest” and “comfort” are closely associated as they both relate to the ultimate removal of the curse, fulfilling God’s promise to the serpent in Ge 3:15. This is important, especially in light of the prophecy that it is either fulfilled by Noah or through Noah that this comfort<sup>126</sup> will be achieved.

#### **5.1.1.3 Genesis 6:1-4: The “Sons of God”**

The first four verses of chapter 6 are a narrative set in place to introduce the proclamation by Yahweh in v. 5. It is the action between the sons of God and the daughters of men that appear to drive the statement in v. 3, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.” This narrative also produces a divine timetable for the lifespan of

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<sup>126</sup> In Ge 5:29, the Hebrew נחם is in the Piel, which is consistently translated “comfort” throughout the Old Testament. See Section 4.3.3.

mankind to be 120 years.<sup>127</sup> While the difficulties in these four verses are copious,<sup>128</sup> the point is clear – the actuality of mankind’s complete wickedness is now entirely visible.

That evil was unrestrained and grew exponentially is evident by the progression from Adam and Eve’s grave sin in the garden, Cain’s jealousy, anger, and eventual murder of his brother, the pride of Cain’s family, the polygamy, violence, and arrogance of Lamech, to the presence of the Nephilim.<sup>129</sup> Mankind was manufacturing evil at an accelerating rate.

Given this context, the obvious question is, “Did God make a mistake?” Was the creation of mankind a well-intentioned project gone awry? Were the problems unforeseen by the Divine Creator? Or perhaps God planned on some variation to the plan such as the initial sin in the garden, but his ability to control the situation got out of hand with procreation happening at geometric<sup>130</sup> levels. Seeking the answers to these problems cannot be avoided and it is critical to pursue the answers exegetically first before taking a systematic or philosophical approach.

What is in view are two major facts. First, God graciously created a perfect universe without compulsion or necessity (Ge 1-2). In that universe, He created a perfect world

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<sup>127</sup> This statement can be taken in one of two ways. The first is a decree by God shortening the life-span of the human race to 120 years (Brueggemann, Cassuto, Sailhamer, Sarna, Vawter, Wenham, and Westermann), and the second as a statement that limits all life on earth to be 120 years before judgment (Augustine, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Luther, Calvin, Aalders, Hamilton, Mathews, Ross, and Speiser). This study will agree with the bulk of commentators who take the second position. This is also supported by the fact that life-spans did not immediately reduce to 120. Either way, the statement is certainly one of a declared change in circumstances and one of judgment.

<sup>128</sup> The exegesis of Ge 6:1-4 is beyond the scope of this work, and is not critical to the understanding and satisfaction of the theological problem. The views of this passage are many, yet the primary views are three; this could be co-mingling of the ungodly line of Cain with that of Seth, a picture of despotic kings oppressing their people, or could be the mixing of the demonic realm with that of humans. Either way, it is picture of rebellion that seems to drive a finality of God’s patience in Ge 6:3, and is the picture that God “sees” in v. 5.

<sup>129</sup> The biblical text is not so clear on the sinfulness of the Nephilim. There are diverse views on the nature of the Nephilim, and its discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. The point to be made is just that the existence of the Nephilim is the last recorded event that precedes God’s judgment on the earth. While Ge 6:4 might be a circumstantial remark, Nephilim are also noted in Nu 13:33 and are portrayed as enemies of Israel.

<sup>130</sup> The term “geometric” merely refers to the fact that with longer lifespans, and significantly lower infant mortality rates, the per capita population rate of increase would be much faster than today.

with perfect order (Ge 1:31). Amidst all the created objects, beings, plants, and animals, God created a being in His own image – Adam (Ge 1:27; 2:7). God’s goodness is also exemplified in his creation of a partner for Adam, Eve, who was also created in the image of God (Ge 1:27; 2:18-23) so that there would be perfect communion between them and God.

The second fact is that in this perfect creation (no disease, no sickness, no sadness, no death, etc.) both Adam and Eve chose to rebel against their Creator. They rejected his clear instruction, and doubted the goodness of God (Ge 3:1-6). In response, they were banished from their home and sent out to spend their life toiling for their food and comfort. Despite the forbearance of God, who did not kill these rebels, there was no real overt act of lasting contrition and penitence, and the rebellion that began in the garden now grew to astronomical proportions, which was a complete distortion to God’s statement that everything was “very good” (Ge 1:31). The potentiality of the human race as a whole to become opposite of what God intended was now a reality.

It is this sad state of affairs that precedes the first cataclysmic action of God after He had finished his creative work. When God saw that human activity had run amuck, He provided a 120 year limit (Ge 6:2) for all human lifespan, whether young or old. The question then, must be asked; “Exactly why did God act to bring total destruction?” Is it possible that the limits of his patience were exceeded, or is it possible that something else entirely is going on?

### **5.1.2 Genesis 6:5-9: God seeing and feeling and acting**

What follows in Ge 6:5-9 is somewhat incomprehensible given the awe-inspiring impressiveness of the creation account in Ge 1. How could God take such a magnificent display which was his delight (Ge 1:28-29), and then in one fell swoop destroy that creation like a capricious child who, after fashioning a delightful clay house, mashes it all together in a ball because of a slight impression in one of the walls?<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The intent of the understatement (“slight impression”) is to portray the argument of those who would compare the “minor” sin of disobeying God’s command not to eat fruit from a particular tree to the grand accomplishment of the crown of his creation.

On the one hand, God willed a creation with harmony, unity, and goodness, ordered by the Sabbath rest. On the other hand, it is a recalcitrant creation that is resistant to the purposes of the very one by whom and for whom the world exists (Brueggemann, 1982:73-74). The answer to this incongruity is that this is truly an exposé on the degeneracy of the human heart (Mathews, 1996:339).

Ge 6:5-9 is broken down into three parts involving יהוה “Yahweh” as the subject.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Genesis 6:5-9</b>  <sup>5</sup>Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.  <sup>6</sup> And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them." <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God.</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:5-9</b>  <sup>5</sup> וַיִּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ  וְכָל־יֹצֵר מַחְשַׁבַת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע כָּל־הַיּוֹם:  <sup>6</sup> וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ  וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ: <sup>7</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲמַחֶה  אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר־בָּרַאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה  מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם  כִּי נַחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתָם: וְנֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינַי  יְהוָה: <sup>9</sup> פֶּ אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת נֹחַ נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק  תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדַרְתּוֹ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים  הַתְּהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ:</p>

In the first five chapters of Genesis, typically “God saw” something, which was followed by “God said,” but here in Ge 6:5-9 there is a perceptible yet striking insertion: “God saw,” “God felt,” and “God said.” This new thought is so emphatic that it is stated both before and after the decision to undo his creation (Westermann, 1984: 407).

### 5.1.2.1 What Yahweh saw (verse 5)

In the opening chapter of Genesis, Yahweh “sees” his creation and declares that all is “very good.” Here Yahweh “sees” the thoughts and deeds of men, and moves to bring on complete destruction. The first words that brought illumination into the world, and declared that illumination to be good, have now changed to declare that everything that is illuminated is wicked and intolerable and cry out to bring not illumination but darkness and death.

When narratives begin with “And God saw,” they mean that God did not merely notice something, but rather, the phrase serves to introduce an action of God (Westermann, 1984:410). Cassuto (1972a:301-302) sees a strong comparison<sup>132</sup> with Ge 1:31 “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”, and that his evaluation of human deeds was very different than that of his own deeds. Cassuto presses the point too far, however, when he points out that this is not necessarily an indictment on man, because man himself was not pronounced good in Ge 1, since man had the capacity to do either good or evil. Nevertheless, the issue for God’s feeling and subsequent action is not the destruction of his creation (either by Himself with a flood or by the increasing “violence” on the earth) but rather on what has become of his noble creation (Mathews, 1996:339).

The “seeing” of God in this passage demonstrates that God does not act arbitrarily (Hamilton, 1990:273), and was not a result of an emotional response to a superficial glance, shortened temper, or hasty impulse, but rather, a result of a deliberate survey (Bush, 1976b:120). This is no sudden perception of certain events, but a careful consideration of a state of affairs that had long been in existence, and on account of which a decision has to be taken (Cassuto, 1972a:302).

The object of Yahweh’s juridical (Sarna, 1989:47) investigation is a noun clause beginning with the distinctive Hebrew כִּי. The clause is broken into two equal segments, and the two segments together form the protasis with v. 6 as the apodosis: “When the Lord God saw ... then God was concerned, took to heart” (Wevers, 1993:78).<sup>133</sup> In the protasis, the first segment shows Yahweh seeing the extensive nature of the wickedness of all of mankind, and the second being the intensive nature of that same wickedness (Kidner, 1973:85). Driver (1904:86) calls the effects of this passage “complete and continuous.”

In the first phrase in verse 5, the wickedness that is under review provides the justifiable reason for the judgment of destruction. The alliteration and assonance of רַע רַק רַע is very expressive (Leupold, 1970:260). The adjective רַע often carries the meaning “wicked” or “evil” in contrast to good (HALOT, 3:1250-1251), but it also may mean “that which is not morally pure or good according to a proper standard,”

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<sup>132</sup> Also see Hartley (2008:97; Waltke, 2001:118; and Hughes, 2004:126).

<sup>133</sup> Although Wevers is commenting on the LXX text, which uses a different verb (ἐνθυμέομαι) than נָחַם, the grammatical construction of protasis-apodosis remains the same.

(SWANSON, 8273), which indicates that continual moral failure is the future of mankind. It is not defining a wicked action, but brings out the concept of being broken, or brokenness (Hirsch, 1959b:130), and is used with an implied stative verb describing a state of wickedness that only belongs to humanity (Westermann, 1984: 409-410).

The term **רַעַת הָאָדָם** does not refer to the unhappiness, misfortune, or evil that befalls men in the world (like from a curse), but rather refers to the evil that men have brought into the world (Hirsch, 1959b:130). While over the past two chapters the writer has simply described the fact that sin has been spreading rapidly, here in this passage we now are told about its plenary effects as seen by God Himself. The construct noun **רַעַת** serves as a collective noun (Wevers, 1993:78) which emphasises the universal course of evil throughout the entire human race. It is the evil condition (as opposed to actions) of mankind that is now multiplied over the face of the earth. This multiplication did not represent a growing problem, but rather, demonstrated a sealed reality in that the problem of total wickedness is never reduced.

There is also a connection between the population growth and the pervasiveness and exponentiation of sin. Here in v. 5 it is shown that the wickedness of man was **רַבָּה** on earth while men began “to multiply” (**לָרַב**, a verb in v. 1 related to the adjective **רַבָּה** in v. 5) on the face of the earth. Both situations (multiplying in population as well as in evil) show an antithesis between men’s deeds and God’s deeds (Cassuto, 1972a:302). God’s command to populate the earth came after a blessing, and mankind is distorting the reproduction by multiplying sinful beings rather than holy beings.

This first observation (v. 5a) is followed by an even greater condemnation (v. 5b). It is not just that man is now contaminated, but that every (**כָּל**) thought and intention is corrupt. The repetition of **כָּל** (“all, every” 2x in 5b) and the parallel phrases **רַבָּה רַעַת** “wickedness was multiplied” (v. 5a) and **רַעַת רַק** “only evil” (v. 5b) provides an assonance with the letter **ר** which emphasises the severity of these terms even more (Mathews: 1996:340).

In the second phrase (5b), the noun **יִצָּר** “to form, fashion” is described as being altogether (**רַק**) evil continuously (**כָּל־הַיּוֹם**); “all thoughts are evil all the day.” The word **יִצָּר** can be used to describe the form impressed on the mind or “that which is formed” by the mind (Skinner, 1976:410). The form of the word is not active, suggesting a force in man driving him to evil, but rather, is passive. It does not mean “the former”; i.e.,

the one who forms (the participle form is translated “potter” in Isa 29:16), but rather, that which is formed (Hirsch, 1959b:131).

The fact that יָצַר is an end product is shown by its genitive construct relationship with the phrase מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ לְבָבוֹ “thoughts to his heart.” The heart is the centre of mental and emotional activity and the source of men’s thoughts. For the Hebrew, it is not only the seat of emotion, but also of the understanding and of the will (von Rad, 1972:117). It can be defined as the “thought workshop that produces thought combinations.”<sup>134</sup> Luther (1958:132-133) sees this as a statement that disavows any possibility of man’s free will, especially when seeing the importance of the adverb רַק “only.” It is the observation and conclusion that all “fabrications” or “formations” (Bush, 1976b:120) of the thoughts that arise out of man’s mind and emotions are entirely and unequivocally evil. What God formed (the cognate verb יָצַר is in Ge 2:7, 19 when God formed man and the animals from the soil) was good and perfect. Now everything man’s heart forms is perpetually repulsive (Hamilton, 1990:263).

When looking back to Ge 4:1 – 6:4, the progression of wicked acts seems to rise with each verse. The fratricide of Cain, the seeming indifference of the line of Cain to their Creator in their pursuit of success, the arrogant song of Lamech, and the illicit marriages involving the “sons of God” provide a gloomy history (Skinner, 1976:150). But, it is not really the accumulation of sins and crimes against God that drives the decision for God to act. It is the conclusion through careful consideration (ἐνεθυμήθη in the LXX, Ge 6:6) that man is now totally corrupt, and is a generator of corruption. Man’s soul is a weaver or fashioner, of sorts, and the material is given to him by his mind. After ten generations, it is now observed that whatever materials, good or bad are put at man’s disposal, “only” evil is what is fashioned “all the days.” It cannot be talking about just “evil inclinations” of the heart, as if there were good and bad inclinations, because of the words כָּל “all” and רַק “only” (Hirsch, 1959b:132).

There are few Old Testament texts that portray man’s total depravity (Wenham, 1987:144), but there is no better description of total depravity than “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Walton, 2001:307).<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Leupold (1970:260) quotes Denkwerkstaette and Luther for both of these terms in a cause-effect relationship. In the genitive relationship מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ לְבָבוֹ the heart is the cause or producer of the thoughts and intentions.

<sup>135</sup> Also note Ge 8:21, which states the same facts, but after the flood.

Circumstances prove that the depravity is complete, and is also completely destructive. Within ten short generations, violence that began as a single murder in Ge 4 in near perfect conditions had now proliferated (Ge 6:11). God was fully aware that this violence was a result of the human heart, indicated by his first prohibition that He gave to Noah after disembarking (Ge 9:5).

Walton (2001:308-309) makes an interesting observation when he notes what the context of the passage does not say. Nowhere in Ge 5-6 are other gods being worshipped by the antediluvians, nor is there carnivorous (killing for the purpose of survival) activities. While God saw the resulting violence in the deeds of man, He saw their motivation, and their corrupt “heart” (Mt 15:18-19). The degree of man’s guilt comes as if from a courtroom, demonstrating that man is inexcusably guilty, and incapable of defence, all because of the testimony of an eyewitness: “God saw!” (Stigers, 1976:99).

Thus, the condemnation is not only because of what the accused has done, but because of the nature of the accused. Like the vacuous occupation of Sodom by anyone righteous before destruction, there is nothing “good” in any part of mankind.<sup>136</sup> The depravity is total, and not a temporary state (Hughes, 2004:128) that could be cured by some sort of rehabilitation or therapy sessions. This conclusion was arrived at by careful deliberation and assessment of a condition. It was not like an audit of a balance sheet or profit statement of a company resulting in bankruptcy, although the company and idea itself might be sound. It was like a medical diagnosis of a terminal condition. There is no hope, no cure, and no reason why any subsequent results in the future will be different than the current violence that fills the earth.

### **5.1.2.2 What Yahweh felt (verse 6)**

The second set of verbs with Yahweh as the subject is the Niphal נחם and Hithpael ענב. This set of verbs is the subject of much debate, and they sit at the core of the interpretation. While lexical study and etymology do play an important part in understanding these words and interpretation of the verses which contain them, context ultimately has the greater influence in determining the precise lexical meaning. The lexical study performed in Chapter 4 of this study provides the recommended parameters of נחם as being “comfort,” and “compassion.” The support for the idea of

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<sup>136</sup> Paul references this thought in Ro 7:18, when he says, “there is nothing good in me.”

“sorrow,” “regret,” “breathe deeply,” or “change of mind” is weaker,<sup>137</sup> and therefore the ideas of “comfort” or “compassion” are the preferred possibilities in this context. The word **עֲצַב** can carry the idea of “hurt,” or “grieved” (NIDOTTE, 3:482-483),<sup>138</sup> and not only relates to physical pain but emotional sorrow (TWOT, 2:687-688). In the Hithpael, **עֲצַב** carries the additional force of anger or vexation (BDB, 780), or even outrage (Holladay, 1988:280).<sup>139</sup>

When v. 5a and v. 5b are compared with v. 6a and v. 6b a strong similarity in pattern emerges. In the previous section, v. 5b (extensive sin) was shown to be an expansion of v. 5a (intensive sin). Here in v. 6, the two sections of the verse also follow the same pattern. Both **נָחַם** and **עֲצַב** are parallel verbs of emotion. The Niphal verb **נָחַם** “was comforted” in v. 6a is followed by the more intense Hithpael **עֲצַב** “was angry, vexed” in v. 6b.

The picture in this section, then, is one of growing intensity of emotion leading to a satisfactory conclusion, which is judgment. God looks in 5a, and sees not only the extensiveness of sin, but also its intensiveness in mankind. In v. 6, God then feels the emotion of self-comfort, which grows to complete vexation. As this emotion is displayed, God’s resultant action (judgment) is then announced.

#### 5.1.2.2.1 The source of the emotion

The purpose of this study is to determine the exact meaning of **נָחַם** in the divine repentance passages found in four historical texts, and to explore whether it relates to God’s comforting Himself through calculated action rather than exhibiting a reactive feeling based on external circumstances. The verb **עֲצַב** does carry a strong emotional component, largely because of the prepositional phrase **אֶל-לְבוֹ** that follows the verb. That both **נָחַם** and **עֲצַב** carry a meaning of emotion is not in dispute. Rather, the issue is “what is the specific emotion of **נָחַם**, and what is the reason for this emotion?”

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<sup>137</sup> See section 4.3.2.

<sup>138</sup> Terrence Fretheim is the author of this article, and it is clear that his theology influences his lexical work with the statement “God is revealed, not as one who is unmoved by the human response, but as one who is deeply affected by what has happened to the relationship” (NIDOTTE, 3:483).

<sup>139</sup> The only other use of **עֲצַב** in the Hithpael stem is Ge 34:7, where Dina’s brothers are “indignant” (ESV), “grieved” (NASB), “filled with grief” (NIV), “offended (NET), or “outraged” (NJB).

In the previous subsection it was demonstrated that Yahweh did not see a particular infraction, but rather made a careful evaluation of the utter worthlessness of his creation. It is the total depravity of mankind that is in view. The idea of careful deliberation is portrayed in the use of ἐνεθυμήθη “consider” for the LXX translation of נָחַם. Yahweh deliberately observed the first ten generations with great care, and in this short record of Ge 4-5 demonstrates to all that the depravity of mankind is undeniably totally intensive and extensive in its rebellion toward the Creator. It is this fact that Yahweh saw, and actually knew from the point that He said, “Adam, where are you?”

God knew of man’s depravity, patiently waited as sin ran its course, and when the rebellious situation became so apparent that judicially there was no defence, He felt great emotion on that situation before He acted, yet was totally aware of the required and just consequences of that rebellion long before Ge 6:1-4. The two emotions were not initiated by the actions of the plaintiffs, but rather were initiated as the inauguration of two acts of God; judgment and grace.

#### 5.1.2.2.2 Contextual and syntactical observations

Before any theological conclusions can be drawn, it is important to make several important considerations. First, the proposed solution (central theoretical argument – Section 1.7) follows Parunak’s preferred lexical meaning of the Hebrew Niphal נָחַם as “comfort,” “compassion,” or even “consolation” which was discussed in Chapter 4 of this study. Second, any considerations of the lexical meaning of a critical word should consider the influence of the theme of judgment and grace throughout the Old Testament, especially in the context of Eden and the antediluvian society.

After these basic considerations from the previous lexical study of נָחַם and defined methodology, several key observations should be noted. First, the Niphal נָחַם is used directly before (v. 6b) and after (v. 7b), which is the judgment pronounced by God. While this shows emphasis on the emotional component that precedes judgment, it can also be shown that the second use of נָחַם not only follows the judgment in v. 7, but also precedes the pronouncement of grace in v. 8. In other words, Yahweh is נָחַם *before* He provides judgment, and also *before* He provides grace. Westermann (1984:407), like many others misses this point by stopping at v. 7 and ignoring the important statement of grace in v. 8. Those commentators see that judgment is

sandwiched between the two statements of God's נחם rather than the fact that God feels נחם before v. 7 and also before v. 8.

This observation is critical, especially when considering the thematic approach of judgment and grace to the Old Testament, discussed in Chapter 3. Yahweh pronounced judgment on Adam and Eve in Eden, and in the same breath provided grace. They were told that they would surely (with the Hebrew infinitive absolute) die, but were in some sense still kept alive. They were expelled from the garden and from the tree of life, yet they lived a life that was able to experience the worship of their Creator (Ge 4:1-4).

Both judgment and grace are in view from Ge 3 to Ge 5. This is especially true in the repeated epitaph “and he died,” that appears throughout Ge 5, yet amongst all the constant admonitions of death, there is the central figure Enoch, the picture of grace who does not experience death. Therefore, the positioning of נחם *before* judgment (Ge 6:6 – “I will blot out...”), and also *before* grace (Ge 6:7 – “But Noah found grace...”) is not just coincidental, but illuminating.

A second key observation is that the three verbs in Ge 6:6 (נחם, עשה, and עצב) all appear in precisely the same order as the opening words of Noah's father, Lamech in Ge 5:29.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Genesis 6:6</b> And the LORD <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">was sorry</span> that He <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">had made</span> man on the earth, and He <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">was grieved</span> in His heart.</p> <p><b>Genesis 5:29</b> Now he called his name Noah, saying, "This one <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">shall give us rest</span> <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">from our work</span> <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">and from the toil</span> of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed."</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:6</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה כִּי עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בָּאָרֶץ וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ:</p> <p><b>Genesis 5:29</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחַמֵנוּ מִמְעֹשֵׁנוּ וּמִמְעֻבְדוֹ יְדֵינוּ מִן־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה:</p>

Cassuto (1972a:303) sees this as no coincidence, as there is a definite parallelism here that *possibly* forms an antithesis of thought. Lamech, who prophetically named

his son Noah, which means “rest” sought relief (נחם) from the grief (עצב) brought by the work (עשה) of man’s hands as a result of the curse in Ge 3:17-19. Yahweh, was sorry (נחם) from the grief (עצב) caused by the work (עשה) of creating man.

While Cassuto and others<sup>140</sup> see the antithesis to the degree that נחם should be translated “sorry,” given the lexical understanding of נחם developed in Chapter 4 of this study, where the word carries the preferred meaning “comfort,” “console,” or “compassion” in all contexts, is there possibly another theological view that is compatible with the immutability of God? Those who see the antithesis, conclude this to be just pathos or emotion preceding judgment because of an intolerable culmination of wicked deeds. But, is that correct?

Snider (2007:166) says the legitimate meaning of “comfort” is not possible for the Hebrew נחם in Ge 6:6 for the obvious reason “that it would not make sense to say YHWH was comforted that He had made creatures who had become so wicked.” This conclusion, however, is more focused on a process of increasing wickedness rather than a state of being.

From the fall, mankind was in a state of complete intensive and extensive wickedness. All men were born into this nature, as evidenced by Yahweh’s comment to Himself in Ge 8:21 where “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” The context here is not one of Yahweh’s being pressed to the limits for judgment, since He announced the judgment of death in Eden, but it is one of being longsuffering so that it is clear that He is acting with total righteousness and that “every mouth may be closed” (Ro 3:19).

There is no obvious indication of God responding in a fit of anger, although the idea of עצב “grieved” in the Hithpael portrays the idea of indignation, as shown by the only other use of the Hithpael in Ge 34:7, where Dina’s brothers react to the rape of their sister. There is no inconsistency here, in that this is the type of reaction expected by a God who judges righteously. The wickedness deserves the full fury and wrath of the righteous judge, and therefore that is what is meted out. The timing of the grief is only after careful consideration of the facts.

God’s grieving and sorrow may be more palatable than one of rage, but nevertheless this view still has problems. How is it, that God is passable, yet also immutable and

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<sup>140</sup> See Snider (2007:166-169)

omniscient? How does He feel regret or sorrow, if He surely not only knew, but planned all the preceding events? Traditional translations seem more bewildered than confident in the understanding of נחם in the Niphal with God as the subject.

The idea of repentance is a rather weak attempt at translating the original (Stigers, 1976:100). Walton's (2001:310-311) idea that נחם means "comfort" approaches the core lexical meaning of the word, but is curious because he inserts his own meaning for the Niphal נחם to be an accounting term used to keep ledgers in balance. The idea of acting to keep personal, national, or "cosmic" ledgers in balance seems to imply loss of control. The point of maintaining balance, however, is not lost. With God, all wickedness must be judged. Any and all grace must be accompanied by propitiation. God's attributes must be on full display at all times, and must not be compromised.

Stigers (1976:100) sees the reflexive Niphal as maintaining its more natural "God comforted Himself," or "God was comforted." He goes on say, "The meaning is this: while the mercy of God, so to speak, prolongs the time during which the judgment is restrained, yet the justice of God is ultimately to be fulfilled on men."<sup>141</sup> In this sense, even though God was longsuffering in the delay of his judgment, and even waited 120 additional years after a ten generational display of wickedness, God was comforted and justified in executing judgment. When the use of נחם is seen to precede God's grace in v. 8, then the full character of God is now shown, and the glory of God displayed.<sup>142</sup> When this happens, God is comforting Himself.

The importance of Lamech's prophecy in context cannot be understated, along with the use of identical terminology relative to the prophecy and Yahweh's next actions involving Noah. In addition, there is a stark contrast between Yahweh's both coming in judgment and mercy (Ge 6:5-8) and the naming of Noah (Ge 5:29) in that it is amplified by the play on the Hebrew letters נ, ח, and ם in the root words נחם, נח, נחמה, and נח (Hartley, 2008: 97). This thread ties all of these actions together, and given that the naming of Noah looked specifically for relief from the effects of the curse, and that after the flood Yahweh smelled a "pleasing aroma" – נִיחֹיֹם a derivative form of נִחַ, it is best to see that the prophecy was fulfilled in Noah.

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. Ro 9:23 and 2Pe 3:9-15.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Ex 34:6-7.

That Lamech did not see the ultimate fulfilment or even understand the fulfilment is irrelevant as that is the case with many Old Testament prophecies (i.e. Isa 7:14). Contextually, the issue for Lamech was death, as his was the first generation to witness the death of the “firstborn” of creation, as well as the translation of Enoch, which demonstrated that there is a potential from relief from the curse. It is not the working of the fields for food that concerned Lamech,<sup>143</sup> but rather the fear of stark reality of death, and the hope that somehow there would be grace. The “rest” that Lamech speaks of is eschatological.

#### 5.1.2.2.3 Relationship with Genesis 8:21

A final contextual observation is the repetition of the words of Ge 6:5 in Ge 8:21. The indictment of mankind is because Yahweh saw extensive and intensive rebellion. Specifically, the judgment of man is due to the intensive nature, and deliberate specificity of his sin in Ge 6:5, and its repletion in 8:21. No matter how widespread the destruction, there is no chance for rehabilitation or correction. Every thought manufactured from the heart is continually wicked. In the same way, this is not a learned behaviour, because man’s heart is wicked “from his youth.”

<p><b>Genesis 6:5</b> Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.</p>	<p><b>Genesis 8:21</b> And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.</p>
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This observation is necessary to the understanding of נחם in Ge 6:6-7 as “comfort,” “compassion,” or “consolation,” because it begs the question: “If God was sorrowful, regretful, or repentant that He made man because of betrayal in Ge 6:6, then how is God satisfied and pleased in Ge 8:21 when mankind has not changed at all?” If God was unhappy or remorseful in Ge 6:5-7, then what is it that made Him happy or restful<sup>144</sup> in Ge 8:21? If God’s sorrow or regret was because of man’s condition, then how has this emotion changed to pleasure through the soothing aroma followed by

<sup>143</sup> Cf. the views of Westermann, Skinner, Kissling, and Sarna discussed in Section 5.1.2.

<sup>144</sup> The word נִיחֵם “soothing” is from the root נָחַח “rest” which is also related to the name נֹחַ “Noah.”

blessing? Since nothing changed in mankind (Noah, his family and future generations), and perpetual wickedness is his only future, what changed God's attitude?

Ge 8:21 is the only text in Scripture that clearly shows God actually smelling a sacrifice. In a negative sense, Israel is warned in Lev 26:31 that God will not smell<sup>145</sup> their sacrifices while they are disobedient, and in a positive sense, in 1Sa 26:19 David prays that God will "smell" his sacrifice. In both cases, the Hebrew רִיחַ may be translated "accept." When God smells a sacrifice, the implication is his acceptance of both the sacrifice and the offerer (Wenham, 1987:189).<sup>146</sup> Stigers (1976:115) translates the phrase in Ge 8:21 as "propitiating odour" because the wrath of God is pacified, and he sees this as symbolic of Christ's having been sacrificed "before the foundation of the world."

Surely the sacrifice by Noah did not appease God's wrath, because the flood abated before the sacrifice was given. What caused Noah to avoid the wrath of God? Only one thing – grace, unmerited grace (Ge 6:8). The sacrifice came from Noah after God was appeased from his judgment. In addition, the words of God in Ge 8:21 are that He will לֹא־אֶסְפֹּךָ "never again cause" (Hiphil participle of אָסַף לְקַלֵּל "to curse" the earth. The latter word, the Piel קָלַל, "to curse, make contemptible" (BDB, 886), "to declare one cursed" (Holladay, 1988:319) is not the usual word for curse (אָרַר) which was used in Ge 5:29 (Mathews, 1996:394).

This is not the lifting of the curse, or removal of the curse, but the fact that there will not be an additional curse, or "light treatment" of the earth because of man's sinfulness. All mankind must contemplate death – this is not removed. It is, however, a promise that there will not be any additional curses from that time forward.

If נָחַם is taken as "sorry," or "regret" then it must be acknowledged that there is a change of emotion by God, without a satisfactory understanding of what brings that change. This type of understanding can lead to the idea of God needing a different strategy for dealing with the sin of humanity (Kissling, 2004:315), and begins to lead to unexplainable problems with immutability and omniscience as objective attributes

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<sup>145</sup> The word רִיחַ "smell" (also used in Ge 8:21) is related to רוּחַ "spirit" and is also related to נָחַם "rest." See Fitzgerald (1978:481) and Barrick (2011:6).

<sup>146</sup> Also see Ex 29:18; Lev 1:9; 3:16; Nu 15:3.

of God. If נחם, however, is taken as “comfort,” then there is no change of emotion in God at all, and there is a consistent comfort shown that is antecedent to the actions of both judgment and grace in Ge 6:6-7, as well as a continuous emotion that is at least “pleasant,” or “pleasing” (הַנְּיָחָה) if not reflecting being “comforted.”

#### 5.1.2.2.4 Summary of observations

Lexical meaning is derived from syntactical usage and context, which carries greater weight than just looking at potential semantic boundaries provided by lexicons. Exegesis must precede theology, and syntax and context must shape lexical specificity. The lexical meaning of נחם in Ge 6:6-7 is a case in point of this axiom. When the context is closely analysed, and the verse is viewed in its proper setting of the Old Testament, along with the understanding of the theme of “grace within judgment” that runs through the Scriptures, then not only a clear meaning emerges, but a meaning that provides more consistency with key doctrines such as immutability and omniscience.

A context of God confirming the depravity of man rather than reacting to “one sin too many” portrays a God that has always been sovereign and in control of all circumstances; past, present, or future. The confirmation of man’s depravity also shows the righteousness of God in that through Scripture, He is confirming to his creation that his righteous judgment is not only warranted, but expected.

The strategic placement of Yahweh’s נחם occurs directly before two separate yet opposite proclamations. The first occurrence of Yahweh’s נחם is before the emphatic statement of נחמה “blotting out” all mankind and all animals excluding the fish. The second is before a contrasting statement where Yahweh provided grace that was “found” by Noah. Observing both verses, it is clear that a specific emotional response was followed by a subsequent direct action. One action was judgment, the other was grace. In both cases, however, the emotion was identical – נחם.

The prophecy of Lamech within the context of Lamech seeing the first death in Adam, and the first unnatural avoidance of death in Enoch points to an eschatological comfort. The name “Noah” is semantically tied very close to the point of the prophecy (יְנֻחַמֵּנוּ and נֹחַ). The “resting one” will be the “rest / comfort giver.” The comfort is specifically stated as comfort מֵעֲבֹרֵי “from the pain / toil” resulting from the מַאֲרָה

“curse.” It is clear that Lamech is looking forward to relief from what happened in Ge 3:16-17. In addition, the wordplay of similar words (נָחַם, נָחַם, נִחַם) connect the events of the prophecy by Lamech, God’s actions of the flood and ark, and God’s satisfaction when He “smelled” Noah’s sacrifice.

When Noah and his family disembarked the ark after a harrowing and terrifying experience of worldwide cataclysm, there was a significant remembrance. Noah took seven clean animals that were reserved for this very purpose, and sacrificed them to God. This sacrifice was a comforting or restful sacrifice which celebrated the propitiation of his wrath. The flood was over, no doubt, as the massive vessel rested on the top of Mt. Ararat, but the notice of appeasement (for the readers of the text) did not come until the sacrifice.

The point to be made here is not that the sacrifice caused appeasement, but that God was appeased without any change in the nature of man. A perpetual sinful nature was still guaranteed. If God was “angry” at the nature of man “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” then what could have quelled this anger since it was not a change in man? The answer is Ge 6:8 – grace. God comforted Himself back in v. 7 and then acted on that comfort by giving grace to Noah. That comfort continued on through Ge 8:21 when God smelled the “soothing aroma.” That God was pleased and propitiated in Ge 8:21 without any change in the nature of man provides strong evidence that God never changed his emotion.

### **5.1.2.3 What Yahweh did (Genesis 6:7-9)**

After careful observation and consideration of the total depravity of his prized creation, Yahweh now acts. But, his actions are not just in judgment. Careful analysis of this passage shows two distinct actions: judgment and grace. God set out to “blot out” all living creatures<sup>147</sup> in his creation, but He also set out to hold back for one family.

The first action by Yahweh is given in Ge 6:7 with the Hebrew word אָמַחַהּ, which is used as a voluntative (to express intention). The verb מָחַח is translated “blot,” or “wipe out” and is used of erasing names from records (Ex 17:14), or cleaning dishes (2Ki 21:13). Hamilton (1990:275-276) defines it as “to erase by washing.” In Num 5:23,

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<sup>147</sup> The text clearly states the destruction of all creatures that hold the breath of life. Fish and “sea monsters” are naturally excluded because they survived and thrived in the water.

curses were written in a book relating to a woman accused of adultery, and then they were “washed off” (מחה) into the waters of bitterness.

More specifically related to this context of complete judgment, the word was used by Moses, who requested that God מחה “blot out,” or “erase” his name from the Book of Life as a propitiatory act to save his countrymen from the wrath of God. The idea is one of removal or obliteration, and perhaps hints at the actual means of destruction since water (Num 5:23) was often the means of total removal (Wenham, 1987:145).

The words הַאֲדָמָה מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם “from man to animals to creeping things and to the birds of the heavens” is a hendiadys (Hamilton, 1990:276) meaning “all living creatures, human as well as animal.” Either the animals are innocent victims or contaminated co-conspirators in the violence and wickedness in the world. The deluge would kill all forms of life.

Conversely, the word מחה is also used in the Hebrew Bible in a positive sense with the idea of washing away sins (Isa 43:25; 44:22; Jer 18:23; Ps 51:3, 11). God erases sins as well as sinners. This threat of מחה is again stated by God to Noah in Ge 7:4, and the actual manifestation of the action begins with the actual flood in Ge 7:23. Mathews (1996:345) sees a sound-play of מחה in v. 7 with נחם in v. 6, and notes that this is not the last word because a small remnant is delivered in Ge 8:18-19. Wenham (1987:145) says that נחם and מחה make paronomastic allusion to Noah (נֹחַ), the man who found favour (חן) in the eyes of the LORD.

The Hebrew חן means “grace” or “favour,” and is often used to depict a heartfelt response by someone who has something to give to someone with a need (TWOT, 1:303). Some would even say that for חן to have its proper meaning, then it means that the recipients of חן actually deserved the judgment as well (Ross, 1988:184).

To find favour is a formal expression often used when someone is making request of a superior (Ge 33:8, 10) or when someone in authority helps someone without status (Ge 39:4). Grace is seldom used of God’s approval of an individual, (Jdg 6:17; 2Sa 15:25). The honour of receiving grace or favour is also given to Moses. In addition to the paronomastic allusion between נח and חן in Ge 6:7-8, and the wordplay on the root נוח (נִחוּחַתִּי) in Ge 8:21, this same grace cannot help but be noticed through the Hiphil of נוּחַ in Ex 33:14 where “rest” is given (in the Hiphil, there is assonance with the first

2 letters (חן) when God's presence goes with Moses. In v. 8, Noah explicitly מָצָא "found" this grace, or unmerited favour.

Mathews (1996:145-146) says חן functions here in v. 8 as a sound play on the name Noah (נח) by the inversion of the Hebrew letters נ / ח. While Noah is newly introduced in v. 8, he is clearly the focal point, with the thrice used repetition of his name in v. 9, to go with the previous declaration of his receipt of grace in v. 8. The *toledoth* of Noah is pronounced in v. 9, yet the expected procession of the names of his heritage is missing. What follows are three simple Hebrew sentences that comprise ten words in the original; *Noah was a righteous man. Among his peers he had integrity. With God Noah walked.* The ten Hebrew words comprising these three sentences bring remembrance to Noah being the tenth generation from creation, and that the words begin and end with his name (Hamilton, 1990:277).

Sasson (1975:165-166) goes even further by emphasizing three syntactical observations at the end of the verse that infer a comparison between Enoch and Noah. The first observation is the peculiar word order of the phrase found at the end of the verse אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלֵּךְ־נֹחַ. The inversion of the prepositional phrase before the subject / verb stands out because this type of syntactical construction is found more often in poetic passages or where figurative use is intended. The purpose is found in the need to create an entire sentence that formed an inclusio that began and ended in the name of Noah.

Secondly, the Hithpael of הִלַךְ is not construed with one of the normal prepositions such as ב, ל, עַל, or מִן. There are only four examples in the Old Testament where the preposition אֶת follows the Hithpael הִלַךְ, and three of those four have הָאֱלֹהִים as the indirect object. Two of those three instances are found in Ge 5:22-24 describing Enoch, while the third is found here in Ge 6:9. The final observation is curious,<sup>148</sup> in that the inversion of the last three consonants of the Hebrew sentence (ח-נ-ה) in v. 9 read the name Enoch.

While this last point may be overplayed, the idea of the blessing of walking with God must not be missed, as well as the focal point of Enoch in Ge 5 and Noah in Ge 6. Adding to Sailhamer's (1990:74) view that Enoch found life amid the curse of death, and the idea that Enoch was the only man among the antediluvians to whom "and he

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<sup>148</sup> Hamilton (1990:277n9) suggests that Sasson might be going too far with his "overdoing the puns."

died” was not inscribed as an epitaph, Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam making him perhaps the emphatic point of the antediluvian generation.

Like Enoch,<sup>149</sup> Noah נִצְּרָה “found” this grace, or unmerited favour. On the translation of whether this grace is “found” or “won,” in v. 8, Hamilton (1990:276) notices the differences: most translations have Noah “finding” favour with Yahweh, and a few (NEB) has Noah “winning” favour with Yahweh. The difference is drastic and theologically opposed. Hamilton sees the line of argumentation being effect to cause (substantiation) rather than cause to effect (causation). If the order of vv. 8-9 were reversed, then there would have been no doubt that Noah’s blamelessness and righteousness were intended to supply a rationale for his election and escape from the flood. If נִצְּרָה is “grace” rather than “favour” then there is further support for “finding” rather than “winning”. This is also evidenced by the LXX translation using the verb εὐρίσκω “discover” in v. 8.

Any attempt, however, to erect a wall between God’s sovereign mercies (6:8) and the merit of Noah’s righteousness (6:9) is superficial (Matthews, 1996:346). Westermann (1984:411-412) defines dual theologies with J’s theology of favour (v. 8) and P’s theology of righteousness (v. 9). While there is a relationship between the two events, as described above, the relationship is not cause to effect, but rather effect to cause. God is under no obligation to bestow grace to anyone, regardless of the effort or purity of heart. It is a gift that results in righteousness.

Noah is the instrument of consolation (comfort) of mankind for which Lamech prayed. Interestingly, there is a hint of double entendre by the appearance of Noah in v. 8 as it is God who is also comforted by Noah (Mathews, 1996:347). It is not Noah’s life that comforts God (v. 9), but rather God’s selection of Noah to be a recipient of grace that provides the self-comfort. This is implied by the delicate difference in the angle of view of נָחַם in Ge 5:29 along with Ge 6:6-7 and the recurrence of Noah in Ge 6:8. Noah will bring “comfort” to mankind through his surviving God’s propitiation by judgment (1Pe 3:18-21). God “comforts”<sup>150</sup> Himself through the complete propitiation by judgment, and also through the cleansing of a sinner by grace. The payment has been made and applied, which will finally remove the blight of sin on all creation (Kidner, 1973:86).

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<sup>149</sup> While the text does not specifically say that Enoch received grace, it is not wrong to see that a continuation of life amidst a sentence of death is certainly unmerited favor.

<sup>150</sup> This idea of self-comfort could also be described as “appeased.”

One feeling (נחם) is followed by two acts; judgment (נחזה) in total destruction and grace (נחן) in restoration and life amidst death.

## 5.2 Exodus 32:12-14

The second of the four major texts describing the נחם of God is found in the second book of the Torah. This is the second use of the Niphal נחם with God as the subject, and interestingly, unlike the account in Ge 6:6-7, this account does not just involve God “seeing,” “feeling,” and “acting,” but rather adds one more characteristic, and involves God “seeing,” interacting with a mediator, “feeling,” and “acting.”

While there is less use of lexical wordplay and prophetic inferences like those found in Ge 6:6-7, there is a similar context of increased or extreme wickedness followed by God’s method of dealing with that wickedness bringing self-satisfaction. While the differences (such as the introduction of a human mediator) are striking, this passage of God’s self-comfort must be also viewed in the light of the theological conclusions reached in the Genesis account with Noah. God’s nature and purposes do not change.

### 5.2.1 Broad context of the book of Exodus

The account begins with chapter 32, however others see this section of chapters 32-34 as a disruption in the flow of the book. Brueggemann (1994:927) states that this section (32-34) disrupts the expected sequence of command (25-31) with implementation (35-40). It is, however, an important and intentional theological arrangement that provides something like a paradigmatic break in the world intended by God for Israel.<sup>151</sup> An argument for textual unity is given by Moberly (1983:45-51) who notes that the logic of a final redactor’s purpose in this narrative is demonstrated by the text moving from sin (32) to dialogue (33) to New Covenant (33).<sup>152</sup>

While this section is very complex (Hyatt, 1971:301), some take the complexity and see a disunity pictured in the text.<sup>153</sup> It is perhaps within this idea of disunity that opens the door to a “process theology” approach, or other variants of openness exegesis. The result is an accusation that traditional theology ignores the content of Ex 32

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<sup>151</sup> In actuality, Brueggemann (1994:927) reads directly from Ex 24:18 to Ex 32:11, skipping over all the intervening material attributing these verses to earlier authorship.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Bruckner (2008:280).

<sup>153</sup> Contra Hyatt (1971:301) and other literary critics.

(Master, 2002:585). This study will directly address this accusation through the incorporation of the canonical approach in agreement with Childs (1970:557-581), and will interpret the sense of the whole text (Ex 32-34) as a unity that fits neatly within the context of the entire book. Within this context, several questions about the power and nature of prayer will be answered, as well as questions about the immutability of God.

Understanding the book of Exodus as a whole (and especially chapters 1-31) must precede any understanding of the transition and difficulties beginning in chapter 32. Master (2002:586) notes that in these first thirty one chapters there are significant patterns that emerge which highlight the theology of the author. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and transition from Israel's freedom in Canaan to their bondage in Egypt. There is a transition from the patriarchs to the specific nation of Israel, and the continuity of creation and promise themes within Genesis continue on into Exodus (Fretheim, 1991:24; Master 2002:587).<sup>154</sup>

Master and Fretheim concur that chapters 2-15 represent an ongoing dialogue between God and Moses, as well as deliverance of Israel.<sup>155</sup> In this section dealing with God's intervention on behalf of his chosen people, it is clear that Exodus presents a God who is not thwarted by either his people, their choices, or unforeseen circumstances. The role of a mediator is introduced here in this section, and more fully developed through chapters 32-34. The idea of God's *יִזְכֵּר* "remembering" his covenant with the patriarchs is noted at the close of Ex 2, and Fretheim (1991:48) notes that this remembering is not a reference to a jogging of the divine memory, as if God had forgotten promises made, but rather that this remembering always means action that will affect the future.

Master (2002:587) takes this point further, when he observes that while in dialogue with Moses, God reveals that even though Pharaoh becomes increasingly cruel, God's ultimate plan is for Israel to receive the initial promise from God – living in the Promised Land. On this dialogue, there are two important notes to observe. The first is that it is only within the context of dialogue that God reveals Himself and his nature to

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<sup>154</sup> Both Master and Fretheim are noted here not only for their exegetical work, but as a demonstration of the clarity of context. Master represents Traditional Theism while Fretheim embraces Open Theism.

<sup>155</sup> Master titles this section "Dialogue and Deliverance."

Moses.<sup>156</sup> The second note is that there is no implication at all in the text that Pharaoh, or any future action by Pharaoh, would ever hinder or impede God's plan. It is God who actually hardens Pharaoh's heart, and God actually uses this pertinacious and callous attitude to magnify his own glory (Ex 7:3-5).

Final deliverance to Israel and destruction of the Egyptian army is given in Ex 14 after the sequence of the ten plagues. While the literary purposes of the plagues could be to show the individual impotence of each of the specific Egyptian gods, Master (2002:588) presents the idea that the narrative actually pictures that it is only a Creator God who can provide blessing, especially in a creation run amok. This significance is especially noted in his observation of the fact "[t]hat God, as Creator, alone could bring blessing and curse becomes a foundational theological truth upon which the Law is based. Further, the plagues underscore the powerlessness of humans in the work of redemption." God is singularly set apart as the Redeemer, and none of his plans and purposes in redemption are frustrated (Cassuto, 1967:149).

Chapter 15 functions as a necessary transition (Cassuto, 1967:173), not only to God's relationship to a redeemed people, but also shows that Moses' relationship with God has not changed (Master, 2002:589). Before, it was God who spoke of his own power to Moses. Now it is Moses who speaks to the people for God's behalf. He not only speaks of God's ability, but also of his willingness to bring a redeemed people into receiving an inheritance.

The idea of a specific separation of people is brought out in chapters 15-18. Set in the wilderness, the narrative shows for the first time God interacting with a redeemed people (Master, 2002:589). God's continued presence with his people set the stage for the giving of the Law in chapters 19-20. God's focus has transitioned from being a redeemer to a provider. In both situations, however, his presence is what is consistent. Master notes that the Law is given specifically to a redeemed people. The Law is given in chapters 19-23, and as one, the people affirmed their covenant with Yahweh in Ex 24 with the echoic "all the words which Yahweh has spoken, we will do."

Further expansion and explanation of the Law is given to Moses in chapters 25-31. After Ex 31, Yahweh, the God of Israel is seen to be a creator / redeemer and a

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<sup>156</sup> Master (2000:587) says that "it could well be stated that these dialogues become a paradigmatic way for God to reveal himself and his nature to Moses".

sustainer / provider (Master, 2002:590). The question that follows, then, is this: After the giving of the Law to a redeemed people, what is the expected response?

After their deliverance from Egypt, Israel was led out into the wilderness by Yahweh Himself, and Moses was the acknowledged intermediary. From chapters 15-31, there is a dialogue between Moses and God. As dialogue continues the expectation is an increasing amount of revelation about the nature, character, and purposes of God (Master, 2002:590). That Moses understood at least what he had been told about God is revealed in the "Song of Moses" recorded in Ex 15:1-18. God is redeemer, sustainer, sovereign, omniscient, and omnipresent. Moses knew that he was leading a redeemed people into the land that God had promised. It was their inheritance, and God was all-powerful and all-knowing in his capacity to fulfil this promise.

After the experience of redemption from Egypt (3-14), and provision in the wilderness (15-18), God established his Law for his people. While the people were enthusiastically committed at first (Ex 19:8), after the specifics of the Law were recounted to Moses, the people quickly took a unanimous decision to let Moses do all the talking and listening from that point on (Ex 20:19). Coming on the heels of the panoramic imagery of the goodness of God's creation in Ge 1-2, and the devastation of mankind's total rebellion resulting in death and the horrific carnage of righteous judgment in Ge 6-8, one would think that the introduction of redemption would result in clear second-chance thinking. Instead, what is seen in Ex 32-34 is a collective short term memory that proves the meretricious nature of their feigned zeal of excitement for obedience. What is seen is total failure.

## **5.2.2 Near context of Exodus 32:1-11**

### **5.2.2.1 The activity in the camp (vv. 1-6)**

Like a dramatic cinema production with action in various locations, here in the first six verses of chapter 32 there is a brief return to the camp of Israel, to zoom in on their thought process while Moses is speaking to their God.

#### **Exodus 32:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become

of him." <sup>2</sup> And Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." <sup>3</sup> Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> And he took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." <sup>5</sup> Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." <sup>6</sup> So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.

Verse 1 of this section (Ex 32:1 – 34:35) continues the narrative that was interrupted in Ex 24:18 (Kaiser, 1990a:478). It is an accurate picture of what God knew from long before (Ge 8:21), thus there is no need to assume that the author added this explanation to provide a pejorative exaggeration for polemic intent (Noth, 1974:247). That calves<sup>157</sup> were used as idols and that earrings were used in the production of such idols is well attested (Enns, 2000:569; Sarna, 1991:203).

It is interesting that this story begins with a reference to the mood of the people, who had tired of waiting for their advocate to descend the mountain and were beginning to conclude he might have left them to fend for themselves (Cassuto, 1967:411). This is quite surprising, in view of all they have seen in the past three months. While they were deeply entrenched for over four centuries of idolatrous practice, and might not be genuinely committed to its eradication (Stuart, 2006:661), this all should have been dwarfed by the impressive and unforgettable exodus from their slave-masters by the Creator God who speaks and provides an endless array of miracles, as well as expresses an inordinate personal interest in them as a people. Bush (1976a:208) writes:

*If ever a situation occurred in the history of man in which we were authorized to expect the presence of a deep and awful sense of the majesty of Jehovah, together with a grateful acknowledgment of his goodness, and a trembling solicitude to avoid every thing which might offend him, it was that in which the race of Israel was now placed at the base of the hallowed mount. They had experienced the most incontestable proofs of the divine power, favor, and love. Little more than thirty days had passed since they had witnessed a scene of*

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<sup>157</sup> The word עֵגֶל in v. 4 actually refers to the strongest of domesticated animals; a full-grown but still young bull (Stuart, 2006:660).

*grandeur and glory such as had never before been accorded to mortal eyes. Jehovah had delivered to them his holy law in the midst of thunder, lightning, earthquake, fire, and the presence of ministering angels.*

After describing the gravity of the receiving of God's Law, and the debacle below the mountain, Bush continues:

*Who could have thought it? Daily fed by manna from heaven; daily refreshed by water from the smitten rock; surrounded by miracles of might and benignity against which it would seem impossible that their eyes should be closed, who could have anticipated, that in utter defiance of the commandment to which they had so lately and so solemnly avowed obedience, they should have ordered the fabrication of other gods, and changed their glory into the likeness of an ox, that eateth grass? Yet this is now the mournful scene which we are now called to contemplate!*

The people are actually “ashamed”<sup>158</sup> or disappointed (Cassuto, 1967:411) that Moses was late or delayed in coming down from the mountain. There is no reference in the text from Ex 24:18 to the current chapter that indicates whether the people had any expectation of the length of time that Moses was to be on the mountain with God. On his previous trips up the mountain, he had not stayed overnight (Stuart, 2006:661), so this long absence proved to identify the breaking point of their faith.

The faith of the people had fallen not only fast, but far. They gathered around Aaron, Moses' brother and prophet (Ex 4:16) and asked for him to create a visible representation of God's presence. The people did not want a new god, but rather in the absence of Moses and any new revelation, they could wait no longer and commanded that a pagan representation of the true God be fashioned. They were not saying that this idol had delivered them from Egypt, but rather that Yahweh's personal presence is associated with the golden idol (Enns, 2000:570).

The grammar in vv. 1-2 is ambiguous as to whether the people desired one or multiple idols. The views of the reason for the use of plurality in the grammar are many. The term אֱלֹהִים is often used as the majestic plural for a singular referent, but the plural

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<sup>158</sup> The Hebrew בָּשָׁם in v. 1 is from the root בָּשָׁם which literally means “to be ashamed,” and is used in Ge 2:25 describing the first family as “not ashamed” when they saw they were naked. Bush (1976b:209) sees the shame and disappointment being the requirement that they tarry for their leader in vain (cf. Jdg. 3:25), and the word in this passage is actually the effect “ashamed” being put for the cause “delayed.”

reference in v.1 עֲשֵׂה־לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ “make gods for us which **they will go** before us” and the use of the plural demonstrative pronoun by Aaron found in v. 4 אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ “**these** are your gods” indicate that perhaps the people were dissatisfied with only one god (Stuart, 2006:663n12). Sarna (1991:204), however, points out that plural forms used with אֱלֹהִים are found in a monotheistic context elsewhere in Scripture. While the actuality of unity or plurality of the idols is ambiguous,<sup>159</sup> the point is that the people were involved in blatant idolatry.

At its worst, the people were not only taken to idolatry, but they were also probably not content with only one god to protect them and provide for them, so they invoked polytheism to placate their fears. In one stroke, they violated the first two commandments. At best, they made a single graven image representing Yahweh, and had still broken the second commandment.

Even though the statement is made by Aaron that “these gods” are not only “your gods,” but also the gods who “brought you out from the land of Egypt,” he is not referring to the idea that this golden image is what accomplished the exodus, but rather that these are an earthly representation of Yahweh (Enns, 2000:570). Cassuto (1967:413) points out that the people could not possibly have left all rational thought and forgot what had transpired in the past few months. They regarded the עֵגֶל as an emblem of Yahweh, making the עֵגֶל a partner with Yahweh and worthy of worship. Another possibility is posed by Hirsch (1959a:608), who says the עֵגֶל is a “reborn intermediary” to replace the missing Moses, and the plural references indicate that they were referring to both Yahweh and His intermediary since God Himself required the partnership of this “intermediary.”

Whether polytheism or syncretism, this significant failure signifies the failure of the nation to keep even the most basic principles of the Decalogue (Master, 2002:592). Regardless of the specific antecedent of the idol(s), the sin is great and this event brings the reader more in line with the assessment of God in Ge 6:5.

In essence, soon after the miraculous delivery and provision by Yahweh, the people have adopted new practices and rejected what He said in Ex 20:2 “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of Egypt.” In effect, they are modifying God’s word, and

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<sup>159</sup> Bush (1976a:210) surmises that both views can be supported by not only this text, but also throughout its reference in other scriptures (Neh. 9:18; Acts. 7:40).

establishing a new religion parallel to what was provided in Ex 20-24. A new altar was built, and a new feast was proclaimed to bring in the new era of worship (Ex 32:5). This was then followed by an almost identical behaviour in Israel's acceptance, celebration, and confirmation of the covenant made by Yahweh. In direct contrast with Moses in Ex 24:4-5, the people rose early, and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. They could hardly wait to begin the fertility ceremony with its obscene rites (Hyatt, 1971:305). This is not only a perversion, but is a systematic step by step reversal of the true celebration of chapter 24 (Stuart, 2006:571).

### **5.2.2.2 God's expressed displeasure with the people (vv. 7-11)**

With the perverse worship and depravity in the camp now described, the readers are brought back to the mountain to hear the discussion between Yahweh and Moses.

#### **Exodus 32:7-11**

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. <sup>8</sup> "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. <sup>10</sup> "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." <sup>11</sup> Then Moses entreated the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why doth Thine anger burn against Thy people whom Thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?"

The seriousness of the situation is shown by a momentum of haste through a chain reaction of imperatives in verses 7 and 10; "Go! Descend! ... Let me alone!" (Durham, 1987:429). The subtleties by Yahweh in vv. 7-8 portray a severe anger and a gulf of separation between Himself and the people whom He had just redeemed and with whom He had just entered into a covenant relationship (Bailey, 2007:344). The use of second person pronouns suggests that Yahweh's passion against the people's self-serving betrayal is as strong as his passion for those who are faithful (Bruckner, 2008: 283). Even though He disowns his people (Kaiser, 1990a:478; Sarna, 1991:204), it is consistent with God's various ways attribution of leadership in the exodus (Stuart, 2006:668).

God assigned to Moses the responsibility of descending the mountain to deal with the sin that was occurring below them. The reason for the imperatives is given in a causal clause in vv. 7b-8, introduced by כִּי; the people were שָׁחָת “morally corrupt.” The normal Hiphil of this verb means “to cause one’s moral corruption” (NIDOTTE, 4:92), but here in the Piel it means “to act wickedly” (Gesenius, 1979:816). Hirsch (1959a:610) takes it even further giving it the sense “to dig a grave for one who is engaged in auspicious progress.” Currid (2001:273) presents a less accepted view, which interprets the Hebrew שָׁחָת as referring to the people’s corruption of God’s Law. There is no direct object, and the most natural reading for the subject is the collective singular עַמֶּיךָ so that one may translate as “Your people have ruined” needing an implied accusative. Either way, it is Moses’ responsibility to deal with a ruinous people, or a precious Law that is being degraded by ruinous people.

Noting the use of the second person pronoun, one cannot miss the sense of separation by Yahweh. In addition, the wording of the people in their dialogue with Aaron in vv. 1-6, shows that the sin of the people is even compounded as they not only consider themselves Yahweh’s people, but also Moses’ people, and that Moses is a necessary and indispensable agent in the act of redemption (Hirsch, 1959a:610).

The timing of the complete reversal to wickedness and evil (such as in Ge 6:5; 8:21) is significant. Yahweh provides redemption to an undeserving people, who have been in bondage over 400 years, and provides a visible intermediary to guide them out of slavery and oppression, and then provides for them in the wilderness as the intermediary goes up on the mountain to receive the laws of their sovereign Deliverer. Almost simultaneous with Moses receiving the good statutes, the people are involved in emphatically and systematically breaking them. This is brought out in the Hebrew phrase סָרוּ מִהֵרָא “quickly turned aside.”

One would expect the text to read “turned aside *from me*,” but the words are noticeably absent. Their worship of the God of Israel is now bound up in all too familiar pagan practices (Sarna, 1991:204). But, Yahweh points out that the original sin was the rejection of his ways and instructions מִן־תִּדְרֹךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶם (Ex 32:8) and not necessarily a rejection of Him as their deity.

As Yahweh clearly defined this sin, through the three subsequent statements of their practice; וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ־לוֹ “they worshipped it,” וַיִּזְבְּחוּ־לוֹ “they sacrificed to it,” and the

ultimate blasphemy **וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִינוּךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם** “and said, “these are your gods, who brought you up from the land of Egypt”, He left no doubt that they had violated the second commandment, and through representation “these are your gods” had also violated the first commandment (Stuart, 2006:669).

What follows in v. 9 is strikingly similar to the situation in Ge 6:5-7. Here on the mountain with Moses, Yahweh states that He **רָאִיתִי** “has seen” the nation Israel. God “sees” all the actions of his people, but more importantly, He sees that they clearly reject his word and instructions.

God sees “this people” in v. 9 in the same light that the people saw Moses as “this fellow” in v. 1. As a whole (cf. Ge 8:21) the congregation of Israel was defiant and rebellious. The Hebrew phrase **קָשָׁה-עֵרֶךְ** refers to an image of wilful obstinacy, and is derived from a farmer’s experience with work animals, especially bullocks<sup>160</sup> (Sarna, 1991:205; Bush, 1976a:214-215). The ultimate sense of the statement is not reactionary, but identical to God’s declaration in Ge 6:5. In context, the meaning of the short statement is “I have long noted, observed, and studied, as it were, their disposition. I know their genius, and the character which I am constrained to give of them is, that they are a stiff-necked people.” (Bush, 1976a:214).

The initial statement by God in v. 10 brings no small debate. It is not the anger of God against Israel that poses the problem, but rather the assumed blessing given to Moses. The initial imperative by God **וְעַתָּה הִנְיָחָה לִּי** “and now let me alone” is taken by some as a feigned sign of total resignation in order to test Moses (Kaiser, 1990a:479). Others see this as a challenge directly to Moses (Stuart, 2006:670), which seemed to forbid intercessory prayer but was really an encouragement for Moses to pursue intercession (Bush, 1976a:215). Fretheim (1991:283) naturally takes the view that while God has decided to execute wrath, the decision is not yet final as He is still considering Moses’ contribution. In agreement with Fretheim, Childs (1976:567) intimates that this is a profound paradox found throughout Scripture. God vows the severest punishment imaginable, yet leaves the door open for input and allows Himself to be persuaded. In contrast, Cassuto (1967:415) sees it as a literal prohibition to

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<sup>160</sup> Cole (1973:216-217) places the metaphorical phrase “a farmer’s metaphor of an ox or a horse that will not respond to the rope when tugged” apposite to the nation Israel, who does not respond to correction. This gives the more intentional meaning “stubborn.”

intercede, yet it is the greatness of Moses who somehow overcomes the weakness of God and forces God to succumb to his greater feeling of love over his feeling of wrath.

Needless to say, each of the above interpretations is fraught with difficulty and needs some elasticity in providing a consistent picture of God's character. To this issue of a strong imperative followed by a picture of severe anger and wrath, the answer is found in looking again at the context of Exodus 32 as a whole, and the continuous disclosure of God's nature and purposes through dialogue. God's attributes of justice and mercy were both revealed and displayed in Ge 3, and then in a more panoramic style in Ge 6-9. As the book of Exodus opened, God's grace is further defined as a redeeming grace through the dialogue with Moses in Ex 3-14. God is now understood as the Creator, who is a righteous yet merciful judge, and specifically a redeemer, which points to the ability to righteously provide and sustain grace. True grace must come out of judgment, but it must also be sustained by an act of redemption.

God's redemption of his people, however, was not just for show. He redeemed them so that He would bless them. His purpose for redemption was to bring them into the Promised Land. To do this required care and protection. So, in chapters 15-28 God is seen as Provider and Sustainer.

Now, here in this account of apparent reversal and destruction of God's plans, a new aspect is also revealed. The new element is the idea of specific intercession by an intermediary, who will be the instrument of redeeming grace. The idea of intentional redemption is picked up by Bruckner (2008:285), who states that the words ("and now let me alone") "reveal that God would not act in judgment unless Moses refused to intercede." Bruckner does, however, go too far in stating that God here is asking Moses' permission to open a window of hope for Israel. But, the main point is made; the idea of intercession is in the words ("and now let me alone"). Bailey (2007:344) also agrees that the phrase acknowledges and anticipates Moses' intercessory abilities and Yahweh's nature to respond to such supplications.

The notion of intercessory prayer is known from Ge 18, where Abraham questioned God's limits of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in Ge 19, and also in God's statement to Abimelech that Abraham will pray for him in Ge 20:7. The full import of this same type of intercession is seen here through Moses' response to God's declaration of judgment. However, it must be said that what is not stated here is that

any intercession is received and acted upon by God (1Sa 12:23; Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). It is the prayers of a particular intercessor that knows the will of God that brings total grace and mercy.

Perhaps a more telling interpretation of this initial phrase by God in v. 10 (“and now let me alone”) is given by Hirsch (1959a:611) who says about **הַנִּיחָה לִּי**:

*[!]If this is meant, “leave me, do not hinder me” it would be **הַנִּיחָה אוֹתִי**. But **הַנִּיחָה לִּי** means “to leave something to somebody”, hence it can also mean “to permit something to somebody”. Here the object is missing, it is either the people or the whole circumstances. . . . So the meaning is: if you were to leave it to me, i.e., if you do not intervene and intercede, if the people are left to themselves, if nothing comes forward out of the people, and in the people, to mitigate and help them over the apostasy, there is no alternative but that they will be destroyed. But My purpose and My promise that it will be realized through Israel will not be lost; for you still remain and you will I make into a second Abraham, and the “great nation” that I promised him will I raise afresh from you, who are also Abraham’s seed.*

The Hiphil imperative **הַנִּיחָה** from the root **נִיח** is used. The specific form in the Hiphil can mean “to leave behind or to leave untouched” (HALOT, 2:680-681; GKC, 539), i.e. “not to hinder, not to intervene.” However, the word is also reminiscent of the other Hiphil form of the root **נִיח** meaning “to cause to rest” or “to pacify.” The name of Noah (Ge 5:29) is related to the same root **נִיח** “rest”. Although not directly related etymologically, there may be a play of words between **הַנִּיחָה** and the word **נָחַם** in Ex 32:12, 14. Moses is told by God not to intervene, with the secondary notion of leaving Him at rest. If that happens, the three subsequent actions indicated in the Hebrew by *wayyiqtol* will happen: (1) God’s anger will burn against them, (2) God will destroy them, and (3) God will make a great nation from Moses. To avert those actions, God must not be “left alone” by a designated intercessor.

If the meaning is that Moses must and eventually does intervene, it is because the action of the intercessor provides rest to God so that God will be comforted in providing grace within judgment. Judgment is coming nonetheless, but the rest is a sign of assurance that the mercy given is not “cheap” or “free,” but that it is based on substantive atonement. The rest is that God can give graciously while still having full integrity in his essence and nature. This is seen in the content of Moses’ intercession.

The most difficult component of this brief discourse is not God's desire to destroy the people that He has just redeemed, but it is his promise to Moses to rebuild the nation with Moses as the new foundation. Both Enns (2000:572) and Stuart (2006:670-671) say this is a desire to start over with new promises to Moses as a new Abraham, and thus replacing the promises to Abraham, while others such as Cassuto (1967:415) see the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham being transferred from Israel to Moses. Still, others see a test for Moses to determine if He desires personal greatness over the original promises of God (Cole, 1973:217; Bush, 1976a:215; Keil, 2001:467).

One must be cautious in developing the intent of this statement, too far in one direction so that Yahweh would be depicted as a tempter,<sup>161</sup> and too far in the other so that Moses would be seen as exalted above God.<sup>162</sup> Yet, with all the tension, the question remains: Is Yahweh's offer to Moses a sincere offer?

Appeals to sovereignty alone could drive the conclusion that Yahweh has every right to start over because Moses is a direct descendant of Abraham (Gowan, 1994:224-225), but as Barrick (2001:159) reveals, this would still result in the repudiation of prior divine promises to Israel. If God were to reconstruct a new plan with Moses alone, how would the surviving Levites fulfil the prophecies to the other eleven tribes pronounced by their father Jacob (Ge 49)? If God did intend this to happen, then either He forgot what was previously declared about the tribes (especially Judah) or his previous prophecies were false and untrustworthy.

It is best to see this statement as a test, resulting in the building of Moses' character and position as intercessor, rather than a temptation to see where his loyalties might lie.

A similar situation is found in Isa 7:11-14, where Yahweh gives the wicked King Ahaz a unique opportunity. Ahaz is told to ask for a sign without limits. He could ask for anything in any sphere – be it personal, spiritual, temporal, or any other sphere in the universe. It is a time when God's command seems to put God at risk. Because the

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<sup>161</sup> Cole (1973:217) almost crosses the line when he calls this "a real temptation to Moses" but tries to qualify it with the following phrase in brackets, "(as real as the temptations of the LORD)." The tension is obvious — yet caution is the watchword. If Yahweh's statement cannot be carried out, it would be devoid of meaning.

<sup>162</sup> Here, Cassuto (1967:415) almost goes too far in exalting Moses when he describes this passage as displaying the greatness of the faithful shepherd in all his glory.

idea of probability clashes with the omniscience of God, the answer is that this is a genuine offer, with no possibility of completing the transaction.

If Ahaz would have accepted, he could have nullified and rendered false numerous prophecies that came before him. But, if not a genuine offer, then the culpability of Ahaz is also cancelled. The best conclusion is that this was a test to demonstrate the utter wickedness of Israel's king, and that even when showered with goodness his only possible choice was to reject even the goodness that results in personal benefit.

In the same way, this offer by God is genuine, but the intent of the offer is not to see if Moses was self-absorbed, but rather a test of how God's shepherd responds to the people that have been entrusted to him. God's shepherd is loyal to God, and tirelessly desires to be transformed into the character of God. Moses is the visible representation of God to His people (Ex 4:16), and to be an effective shepherd he needs to be as close to the mind of God as is humanly possible. That this is truly a test is shown by the results of what happens in the rest of the chapter. Yahweh's personal promise to Moses to make him into a great nation extracts the identical words of promise to Abraham (Ge 12:2), which provides Moses his strongest argument to counter the threat of judgment (Childs, 1976:567). Moses uses God's own promises (vv. 11-13) to shield God's people from the righteous judgment due them for their own egregious behaviour.

The theological understanding then, is clear. First, Moses is called to "go down" to the camp and take responsibility for the people and their actions and correct their faulty behaviour (Ex 32:7). Secondly, Moses is prompted to intercede to God on their behalf for undeserved grace and mercy (Ex 32:10).<sup>163</sup> Without either of these actions, judgment will not only commence; it will prevail.

### **5.2.3 Moses' intercession and God's response (vv. 12-14)**

The reply of Moses is not that of a disappointed child, but rather is that of a covenant mediator and intercessor between God at the top of Sinai, and the people below

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<sup>163</sup> While the text does not indicate that YHWH prompted Moses or asked Moses to intercede, the questions by YHWH to Moses and the resultant dialogue ended up in Moses' intercessory prayer for Israel.

(Currid, 2001:275). There is no room in his advocacy to God for any justification of Israel's sin in any way as shown in his direct appeal in vv. 11-13.

Moses' appeal to Yahweh in vv. 11-13 is based on four facts: (1) Israel was Yahweh's chosen people, (2) Yahweh's manifested power in his deliverance of Israel, (3) Yahweh's annihilation of Israel would bring Him dishonour, (4) Yahweh's former promises to the patriarchs (Bailey, 2007:345).

v.11 “. . .Thy people whom Thou hast brought out from the land of Egypt . . .”	This reveals the nation Israel is the object of Yahweh's act of redemption.
v. 11 “. . . with great power and with a mighty hand?”	The exodus revealed a demonstration of Yahweh's power. A failure of the people to survive could picture a failure of Yahweh's power to sustain his people.
v. 12 "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil <i>intent</i> He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth '?"	The destruction of Israel will surely result in the nations mocking Yahweh's clear failure. Yahweh's intention is to manifest his glory to all people, not ridicule.
v. 13 "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou didst swear by Thyself, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit <i>it</i> forever."	This is a clear reference to the prior unassailable promises to the patriarchs regarding the exponential growth of the nation Israel and their inheritance of the land.

Durham (1987:429) indicates that the sole concern of Moses was purely for the infant nation below, and that he did not even understand the severity of their rebellion. This idea, however, is lost in Moses' words. The accent on the particle לָמָּה in v. 12 is on מָּה, which is the unknown object and the לָ has its ordinary prepositional meaning, so the whole phrase means “to what,” i.e. “for what purpose?” (Hirsch, 1959a:612). Moses is not questioning the statements of Yahweh (which would be demanding some justification) but rather is asking to understand the purpose so as to carry out the objective. His concern was not in the first place for the people, but for the consistency and veracity of God's promises, as well as his nature.

That this is a preparatory test for Moses' subsequent shepherding responsibilities (Barrick, 2001:160) is apparent in his providing identical argumentation later in his career (Nu 14:13-19; Dt 9:25-29). In addition, Moses' actions after descending the mountain are telling. With tremendous zeal for holiness and God's standard (v. 19),

he issued a call for repentance (v. 26) and then commanded the Levites to execute judgment on the people (vv. 27-28).

In the midst of the judgment, however, Moses demonstrates the nature and the heart of Yahweh. He strives to make a new appeal to God on Sinai that he himself might make atonement for the people (v. 30). Going further, Moses even offers his own security and status<sup>164</sup> as propitiation for their sin that Israel might have their sins removed, and that Yahweh would **מחה** “blot out” Moses from his book (v. 32). It should be noted that this verb is the same verb that Yahweh used in declaring that the flood would **מחה** all living things because of the wickedness of mankind.

After his question to God in v. 12, Moses issues an imperative request to God with two verbs, **שוב** and **נחם**:

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Exodus 32:12</b></p> <p><b>Turn from</b> Thy burning anger and <b>change Thy mind</b> about doing harm to Thy people.</p>	<p><b>Exodus 32:12</b></p> <p><b>שוב</b> <b>מחרון</b> <b>אפך</b>. <b>והנחם</b> <b>על־הרעה</b> <b>לעמך</b>:</p>

The verb **שוב**, given the sense “turn” in most translations, is a very common verb found in the Old Testament<sup>165</sup> and carries the basic meaning of “to turn,” or “to return.” The verb also carries the theological meaning of “to repent,” but this is found only in cases where people are the subject. The verb is never used of God as the subject in this sense (NIDOTTE, 4:57). Moses is indicating a desire that God physically turn his burning anger away from his people. In essence, Moses is asking for a deflection.

The parallel verb **נחם** in most recent English translations carries here the general meaning of “relent,” or “change his mind.” While many commentators choose to see this anthropopathically, it has been shown in the lexical study (Chapter 4) that there is no need to do so.

The question is, how can that be the meaning for **נחם** here and still maintain a consistent theology of the Old Testament? Given the consistent choice of meaning for **נחם** seen in Ge 6:6-7, and the near context of severe judgment, the meaning here

<sup>164</sup> He was offered to be the founder of a new nation.

<sup>165</sup> Hamilton (TWOT, 2:909-910) notes that **שוב** has over 1,000 uses, with the overwhelming majority of uses with humans as the subject.

in vv. 12-14 is the same as that of Ge 6:6-7. Moses is asking for Yahweh to turn, or avert his wrath from Israel, and then to be comforted in that turning from הַרְעָה “the destruction” that Yahweh Himself declared. What follows in v. 14 is that Yahweh heeds Moses’ intercession.

A key lexical observation is that the Hebrew Niphal instead of the Piel of נחם is used in v. 12. In essence, Moses is asking that God be passively and reflexively comforted. Moses is offering no comfort, nor is he asking that God provide comfort to Israel. He is asking specifically for God to appease Himself.<sup>166</sup> This is the only force that is capable of diverting or absorbing a decreed judgment from a righteous and holy God.

The emotion of comfort or compassion is also found in the idea of propitiation, which is necessary for the turning of God’s wrath. This is found initially in Ge 8:21, where God is seen as being propitiated even though man is sinful continuously from his youth. The reader, however, is bereft in trying to understand the basis of the propitiation. Here in Ex 32, the idea of propitiation is advanced with the introduction of a mediator. This is evidenced in the LXX by the use of the phrase ἵλεως γενοῦ “become merciful” for the Hebrew נחם in v. 12, and the verb ἰλάσκεῖν “to propitiate” for נחם in v. 14.<sup>167</sup> The idea of propitiation brings satisfaction or appeasement, meaning that the desired effect has still occurred, which is a balancing of order. Rebellion must be punished, and the guilty will by no means go free (Ex 34:7). Satisfaction is synonymous with comfort.

Moses here uses an imperative that shows that he is pleading for God to change his emotion. He is literally saying “be propitious,” and the appeal is grounded in the idea of a redeemed people being God’s possession with the use of the pronominal suffix “you” (לְעַמֶּיךָ).<sup>168</sup> Yahweh, the personal God and redeemer of Israel, is not urged to repent “of” or “from” the evil to his people. Wevers (1990:525) sees significance in the use of the preposition ἐπὶ in the LXX rendering of v. 12 before τῆ κακία (“evil”). Similarly, the word עַל in Hebrew, coupled with הַרְעָה “the evil” may denote reason “because of” or direction “against” (HALOT, 2:827).

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<sup>166</sup> This is the specific view of Calvin (1999:343).

<sup>167</sup> See the discussion on this passage in the lexical study in Chapter 4.

<sup>168</sup> The LXX uses the personal possessive pronoun “your” (τοῦ λαοῦ σου). In addition, that Israel is affirmed as God’s people is also echoed in the pronominal suffix of the last word of v.14 with לְעַמֶּיךָ “his people.”

The fact that the noun ἰλεως (v. 12) and verb ἰλάσκεῖν (v. 14) both share the idea of “mercy” and “grace” (BAGD, 375-376) is significant.<sup>169</sup> Both Gavriilyuk (2004:29) and Fritsch (1943:17-18) see this as a purely deliberate attempt in the LXX to insert anti-anthropomorphic and anti-anthropopathic language. However, in the context of Moses acting as mediator, it makes sense that Moses would be pleading for a change in God’s attitude, and the only basis on which He makes his appeal is God’s purposes and promises. Moses asks God to “become gracious” over and against the evil to Israel, and in v. 14 God “is propitiated”<sup>170</sup> concerning<sup>171</sup> the evil which He said He would do to Israel. This is quite different than being “moved with pity” (Durham, 1987:429), or “changing his mind” (Gowan, 1994:225).

The verb ἰλάσκεῖν is also found in the prayer of the publican (Luke 18:13) “God, be merciful (propitiated) to me a sinner”; i.e. by the intervention of a mediator. In that passage, the publican does not rely solely on the mercy of God irrespective of the required atonement. He, like the Pharisee, was at the temple to pray, most probably at the time of one of the sacrifices. Unlike the Pharisee, he focused on the priestly sacrifice and understood its meaning and took it to heart (Bush, 1976a:217).

In light of the observation of Master that in dialogue with God, there is new revelation about his character and purposes, it is important to look at this brief narrative in that context. In Genesis, God is shown as righteous and merciful. He is shown as being comforted in both. In fact, his righteousness in Ge 6:6 is propitiated with the flood, but his lovingkindness is propitiated with his grace in Ge 8:21. Man is still totally rebellious, yet not only is God’s wrath abated; He Himself is comforted with a soothing<sup>172</sup> aroma.

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<sup>169</sup> Both the noun and the verb in the LXX are used to translate the Hebrew מָנַח. The noun ἰλεως is used with the verb γεινοῦ in v. 12 to bring out the idea “become merciful,” or “become propitious.”

<sup>170</sup> The verb ἰλάσκεῖν is in the aorist passive, so God somehow received propitiation.

<sup>171</sup> The preposition used in v. 14 to translate the same Hebrew word לְעַלֵּי is different. It is περὶ “concerning” instead of ἐπὶ which was used in v. 12. God received propitiation regarding the evil which He himself spoke as a certainty against Israel. The fact that God was propitiated demonstrates that the evil against God still would be punished. God was satisfied with proper punishment. In an immediate sense, many people died that day both due to Moses’ righteous indignation and the plague from God, but in the longer term, all of the people (except Joshua and Caleb) died in the wilderness without receiving the promise and did not enter God’s rest. Ultimately, God is satisfied with the punishment of all evil on the cross (Isa. 53:10, cf. 1Pe 2:24).

<sup>172</sup> See section 5.1.3.2.3.

What new important facts about God are revealed here on Sinai? As shown in the book of Exodus, Yahweh is revealed as a redeemer. He redeems his people out of bondage in order to provide them with a promised inheritance – promised land. In addition, God is not only Redeemer, but also Sustainer and Provider, as evidenced by his provision of manna and water in the wilderness. But most importantly, a new piece of information is added relative to God's relationship with his people, and that is the idea of mediation.

God is holy, righteous, just, and merciful in Genesis. The acts of the flood, ark, destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and deliverance of Lot all attest to these characteristics of Yahweh, the personal God. In Exodus, we see God as Redeemer and Sustainer / Provider, but also we see Him as doing all of this through an intercessor / mediator. God's grace and lovingkindness are not based on random forgiveness, but are bound up in redemption. Redemption is accomplished through the process of intercession by a mediator. In Ex 32:30-32, that mediator is revealed as desiring to provide the necessary atonement for permanent forgiveness of sin.

The necessity of a mediator is pictured in the strong tension that exists in chapter 32. There is a clear picture of the failure of covenantal stipulations to bring obedience when the people now confirm their idolatrous intentions they had from the beginning (Childs, 1976:566). The Law of God had not only failed to transform the people into a grateful and worshipping nation, but it also failed to provide any sort of propitiation of God's anger. The tension here in Moses' pleading is between the just punishment for this inherent sinfulness, the knowledge of sin which the Law provides, and the promises of God. The tension, then, raises the obvious question: by what mechanism will a holy and just God still fulfil his promises over against the contumacious disobedience of his redeemed people (Master, 2002:592)?

Without understanding the advance of revelation about God in the dialogue, then one is left with a conundrum. Either the idea of God's אֱלֹהִים is an anthropomorphism,<sup>173</sup> which does not sufficiently explain God's actions,<sup>174</sup> or is a result of the power of Moses' persuasion. Fretheim (1991:286) suggests that with Moses entering the discussion, God gives Moses' words new status because they are articulated in a

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<sup>173</sup> The word "anthropomorphism" is used here to describe both anthropomorphism and anthropopathism.

<sup>174</sup> See Section 3.1.1.

forceful way. Moses does not “win” the argument, but God now considers his relationship with Moses more seriously. In essence, God decides to נחם because of his relationship with Moses. Because of this thinking, Fretheim concludes the God of Israel is revealed as One who is open to change. Contrary to Fretheim’s conclusion, God does not let the words of Moses remove the sentence of death (Ex 32:34-35).

The answer to the interpretation of God’s נחם in Ex 32:12-14 lies in the use of the Hebrew verb נחם in the context of sin and failure in the midst of redemption and God’s Law. Here in v. 12 נחם is used in parallel with שׁוּב, and is in association with the preposition עַל, followed by a word of judgment. Parunak (1975:524) demonstrates that when these conditions are met, נחם takes on the meaning “forgive.” What is revelatory in this passage is that forgiveness is granted through the intercession and actions of a mediator. In Ex 32:25-28, Moses himself is the spark that lights the flame of justice. In vv. 30-32, it is Moses who generously offers himself as atonement as a basis for grace.

While lexical definitions and semantic studies are critical to understand a specific definition and the semantic range of a word, they do not trump the overall force of the passage and its context as a whole (Barrick, 2001:164). That both judgment and grace are in view is best described by Childs (1976:568):

*The writer brings this scene to a close by an explicit reference to its effect on God. Yahweh changes his mind regarding his intention to destroy Israel. If this sentence is read by itself, it makes the God of Israel as arbitrary as Zeus. If it is read in its full context, it epitomizes the essential paradox of the Hebrew faith: God is ‘merciful and gracious ... but will not clear the guilty.’*

It is the act of mediation that is now the newly revealed component of God’s mercy and lovingkindness. As in the flood account, judgment that was pronounced still was meted out. Yet, within that judgment, grace was also revealed. Here also, judgment and wrath did come on the Hebrews because of their sin. Some were slain by Moses and the Levites, and others experienced a plague from Yahweh. Yet, like the flood this judgment was tempered by the mercy of God – a mercy that came because of the pleadings of the covenant mediator, Moses (Currid, 2001:277). Both judgment and

grace were now demonstrated in full view with and through an intercessor and mediator<sup>175</sup> (Ps 106:23), and it is in both actions that God provides נחם to Himself.

### **5.3 1 Samuel 15:11, 35**

The third of the four major sections describing the נחם of God is found in the account of Saul's failure in obedience resulting in a declaration of his loss of the kingdom.

This last narrative involving the idea of God's repentance does not involve God "seeing," followed by "feeling" and "action." In the Genesis account, God deals with a newly created world and demonstrates that judgment and grace are both provided in with overwhelming force. In Exodus, that same grace juxtaposed with judgment is again demonstrated but this time with and through the actions of an intercessor / mediator. In both cases the epitome of gross wickedness seems to be on display, and the judgment by extermination is the natural and expected response.

Unlike the previous accounts, the act by Saul in 1 Sa 15 actually portrays his minimalist view of sin, rather than a godly view. In fact, this account is set against a backdrop of an apparent victory by Yahweh's people over Yahweh's enemies, which seems to be the fulfilment of prophecy and purpose by Israel's God. The fallacy of "end justifies the means" thinking is shown as God despises both absolute disobedience as well as feigned obedience.

In addition, in 1 Samuel, the effect of both judgment and grace appear to be delayed. While Saul is rejected as king, he continues and remains in the position for more than two decades. The rejection, while absolute, appears to be passive in nature, or at the very least attitudinal. The grace, which could be seen as providing the delay of judgment on Saul, is also seen as a delay of grace on the nation Israel, who did not receive the king of God's choosing until at least twenty years in the future. Similar to the accounts in Genesis and Exodus, there is a "longsuffering" delay in the resultant actions of both judgment and grace. Saul reigned for several more decades, while Israel did not receive her king from God during the same time frame.

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<sup>175</sup> Moses was a mediator in a restricted sense, in that he provided no merit or deed, but only intercession.

### 5.3.1 Context of 1 Samuel 15

The chapter is set in a context of a relatively mature nation, who has lived many generations experiencing their God. They have now possessed the land, albeit not without much difficulty and discipline from God, and they have also selected a king to lead them. After the death of Joshua, God's mediators were found in the Judges, with the final judge being Samuel. Samuel, as the final judge and prophet was the one who fulfilled the role of intercessor and mediator. Saul, as the chosen king was to fulfil the role as leader of the nation, and he was to be in submission to the prophet whenever the prophet was acting as mediator.

Despite the pronouncement that his kingship would not last (1Sa 13:14), Saul was still the king of Israel and recognized as Yahweh's anointed. Through his previous actions of pride and disobedience, he was no longer assured of a family dynasty, because he was now a "rejected kingdom" in God's sight (Tsumura, 2007:386). Samuel had now given Saul direct instructions from Yahweh to completely fulfil his prophecy of utter destruction on the Amalekites (Ex 17:14-16; Nu 24:20; Dt 25:17-19). Saul was to engage in a "holy war" as opposed to a war of aggression or self-defence (Baldwin, 1988:112).

The command given to Saul begins with the imperative שָׁמַע "listen, hear" (1Sa 15:2). This initial command was the most important; the king was to listen intently to God's word. In a covenantal concept, the idea of the Hebrew שָׁמַע "listen, hear" often means "obey"<sup>176</sup> (Birch, 1998:1087). The issue was not to go to battle, but rather in light of the failure of Saul in 1Sa 13, it was to obey Yahweh.

Upon first glance, the battle resembled another rout by Israel over her enemies led by Saul. Once Saul became king, the Ammonites and Philistines felt the sting of defeat numerous times, and the Amalekites were about to be recorded as another victory. The difference here, however, was that Saul did not initiate the campaign. This was Yahweh's war, and He was the commanding general.

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<sup>176</sup> This is especially true when used with the Hebrew לְקוֹל "to the voice," (Birch, 1998:1085) which translates "harken to the voice of the words of Yahweh." Brueggemann (1990:109) says the verb "asserts the immediate authority of Samuel, who is the present unchallenged mediator and interpreter of the covenant tradition of Deuteronomy."

After this clarity of priority and importance, the message was given. It is now the time for Yahweh to fulfil his prophecy on the Amalekites and their king. The faithfulness and truthfulness of Yahweh is now at stake. All the Amalekites were to be utterly destroyed,<sup>177</sup> with no survivors. Absolutely none of the material goods or booty was to be accumulated or used by Israel. The king is not a free man to decide how to implement broad war policy. He is under the tight mandate of Yahweh's will, which was exclusively mediated by the prophet Samuel (Brueggemann, 1990:109).

After Saul has mustered his army, the text (v. 4) indicates that he had more than sufficient personnel to be successful in carrying out Yahweh's commands (Tsumura, 2007:343). This was not a task that required supernatural intervention. Nonetheless, it did require careful and precise obedience to insure full compliance to the instruction. Saul's defeat of the Amalekites went from as far as Havilah to Shur, which is the extent of the Ishmaelite territory from Arabia to Egypt (Bergen, 1996:169).

The disobedience is apparent in its contrast to the direct command of Yahweh in v. 3 to **לֹא תַחַמֵּל** "not spare," or "not have compassion" which was totally disregarded in v. 9 when Saul **יַחַמֵּל** "spared" King Agag as well as the best of the booty. All of the people under Saul's command followed his example. Saul had justified himself in thinking that he carried out the spirit of the command, yet he totally disregarded the specific letter of the commands as the best of the spoil was "spared" presumably for sacrifice. The intentionality of the sin is also emphasized in the description of their motive. The people **לֹא אָבוּ תַחַרְיָמָם** "were not willing to put under the ban" all the good and savoury delights resulting from the hard fought victory. The result was a self-serving obedience by Saul and his army which was an attempt to pursue gain under the guise of serving God (Bergen, 1996:169).

### **5.3.2 The structure of 1 Samuel 15:11-35**

1Sa 15 forms an inclusio between v. 11 and v. 35 . Klein (1983:151) states that the theme of the inclusio is "regret," and Evans (2000:76) holds to "grief" as the theme.

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<sup>177</sup> The Hebrew **תַחַרְיָמָם** "cause to put under the ban" is in the Hiphil, used in a causative sense for the exclusion of an object from the use or abuse of man and its irrevocable surrender to God. The word is related to an Arabic root meaning "to prohibit, especially to ordinary use." (TWOT, 1:324-325).

Because these are English renderings of the Hebrew word נחם, it is more accurate to state that the theme of the inclusio between vv. 11-35 is נחם.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:11</b>            "[regret] that I have made Saul king,            for he has turned back from following Me,            and has not carried out My commands."            And Samuel was distressed            and cried out to the LORD all night.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:11</b>            נַחַמְתִּי כִּי־הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת־שָׂאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ            כִּי־שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי            וְאֶת־דְּבָרַי לֹא הִקְיָם            וַיַּחֲר לְשִׁמוּאֵל            וַיִּזְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה:</p>
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:35</b>            And Samuel did not see Saul again            until the day of his death;            for Samuel grieved over Saul.            And the LORD [regretted]            that He had made Saul king over Israel.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:35</b>            וְלֹא־יָסַף שְׁמוּאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־שָׂאוּל            עַד־יוֹם מוֹתוֹ            כִּי־הִתְאָבֵל שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׂאוּל            וַיְהִי נַחַם            כִּי־הִמְלִיךְ אֶת־שָׂאוּל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>

The section begins and ends with a statement of emotion by Yahweh, and the intervening verses describe the action by Yahweh. In the midst of this action, there is an apparent contradiction, where the text states that God is apparently contradicting his previous statements of emotion in vv. 11 and 35. Yahweh does נחם from an action that He had previously done, yet He is not like a man that would ever נחם.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:29</b>            "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie            or [change His mind];            for He is not a man            that He should [change His mind]."</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:29</b>            וְגַם נֶצַח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקֶר            וְלֹא יִנָּחַם            כִּי לֹא אָדָם הוּא            לְהִנָּחַם</p>

The problem in this section is one of Yahweh's "repentance" – or non-repentance. Because of the conundrum, for many exegetes the solution of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism provide the necessary relief of tension.<sup>178</sup> The danger of this, however, is that the difficulty is just dismissed because the focus is on the form of the message and neglects the truth that accompanies it (Davis, 1994:18). In this way, if

<sup>178</sup> See Gordon (1986:144), Smith (1969:135), and Tsumura (2007:346).

נחם is anthropopathic, it acts in a sense like a “wild card” that can be used in any way to fit the reader’s theology (Smith, 1969:140).

A second approach in handling the difficulty borders on introducing the possibility of a mutable God. The solution is bound up in an implied reaction to human free will decisions (Baldwin, 1988:114). If God is mutable in the sense that He reacts to minor events in a “perfect” way that does not affect an ultimate purpose, it does demonstrate that “minor” purposes are thwarted. This, however, begins to raise an eyebrow to passages like Ps 135:6 where it is stated that all that Yahweh pleases is accomplished. In addition, this also traps the exegete into ambiguous and even contradictory statements such as “God is not slavishly bound by his own decisions, but is almighty to such an extent that he is Lord even of them” (Hertzberg, 1976:126). However, such a statement is in direct contradiction to Heb. 6:13-18.

This idea puts God in a situation where He is co-ruling the world with his creation through some type of coerced cooperation. God chose Saul in the hopes of creating an obedient and righteous people, but because of Saul’s non-participation, God is “forced” to seek for another agent of his purpose (Mauchline, 1971:123).

### **5.3.3 The approach of contrapletal logic**

In 2008, a new approach to this difficult text and the apparent contradiction between the use of נחם in 1Sa 15:11, 35 and 1Sa 29 was introduced by Ben Johnson. In his technical paper submitted to the Northwest Region of the Evangelical Theological Society titled *Contradiction and Constancy: A Proposal for Understanding God’s Repentance in 1 Samuel 15*, Johnson (2008, 13-14) argues that the correct interpretation is to accept a genuine paradox. In summary, Johnson says that the writer of 1 Samuel provided an intentional contradiction to emphasise the reliability and finality of the rejection of Saul’s kingship and also to make a theological assertion about God. This assertion is that it is true that God does change his mind, and it still can be said of Him that He does not change his mind (2008:19-20).

Making an appeal to R. W. L. Moberly’s (1983:33) view of the paradox of God’s immanence and transcendence, Johnson accepts the idea of a biblical paradox. Here, Johnson is referring to the less commonly used meaning<sup>179</sup> of paradox, namely that of

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<sup>179</sup> See Grudem (1994:34n10), where he says the idea of “contradiction” is “less commonly” used.

a real and not apparent contradiction. He supports this view by the use of what is called ‘contrapletal logic.’ Nells Feré (1966:22) defines contrapletal logic as, “[a] complementary relationship of seeming opposites, like night and day or summer and winter, in a larger unity that includes both.” While the opposites are concretely opposite (day and night, first and last, etc.) Johnson notes that Kuyper (1969:271) affirms that God’s changeability and unchangeability are held together by contrapletal logic.<sup>180</sup>

Following the thoughts of Brueggemann (1997:117) who said, “the Old Testament does not (and never intends to) provide a coherent and comprehensive offer of God.”, Johnson (2008:14) presupposes that God is actually bigger than what is presented in the biblical texts. While this may ultimately be true (Isa 55:8-9), it is also true that what is not stated in the texts we cannot know objectively.

Johnson’s approach to these texts is built around the nuances of the Hebrew verb נחם in its four occurrences in the 1Sa 15. Johnson (2005:17-18) notes that there are no parallel verbs of emotion with God (such as in Ge 6:6 with God’s “grief”), but he does correctly identify a parallelism in the passage between the emotions of God and Samuel (v. 11, 35). Because of this, he says that God’s emotions are compared to those of Samuel’s in vv. 11, 35. At the same time, the analysis of the two uses of נחם in v. 29 indicates that God’s emotions are contrasted with those of Saul.

The picture of contrast in v. 29 is very straightforward, and is rightly portrayed as a companion passage to Nu 23:19. God is contrasted with humanity, in that He is not like a man who would lie or change his mind. And, more specifically, the human in question that is nearest in context is Saul, who changed his mind and story numerous times as Samuel confronted him with his sins (Johnson, 2008:16).

The contrapletal logic comes into play when the idea of comparison is brought forth. Drawing on Parunak’s (1975:519) definition of “suffer emotional pain” for נחם in this text, Johnson (2008:18) concludes that in vv. 11, 35 the Lord’s emotions are being

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<sup>180</sup> Kuyper (1969:271n1) says that the idea of contrapletal logic was introduced to him by Kenneth Woolcombe, who supposed that it is possible “to hold paradoxically that God is both passible and impassible without any breach of contrapletal logic” (Woolcombe, 1967:142).

compared to those of the prophet Samuel as opposed to v.29 where the Lord's reliability is being *contrasted* against that of King Saul.

### Parallelism of Yahweh and Samuel's Emotions

#### v. 11

<i>Object</i>	<i>Verb (Emotion)</i>	<i>Subject</i>
כִּי־הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת־שָׁאוּל that I made Saul king	נִחַמְתִּי regret	נִחַמְתִּי I (Yahweh)
	וַיַּחַר was troubled	לְשָׁמוּאֵל For Samuel

#### v. 35

<i>Object</i>	<i>Verb (Emotion)</i>	<i>Subject</i>
אֶל־שָׁאוּל over Saul	כִּי־הִתְאַבֵּל grieved	שָׁמוּאֵל Samuel
כִּי־הִמְלִיךָ אֶת־שָׁאוּל that He had made Saul king	נָחַם was sorry	וַיְהוּהוּ And Yahweh

While there is no problem with God showing emotions like his prophet (God is passable), the issue comes with assuming that God could change his mind like his prophet<sup>181</sup> (who is a man). There is no real problem with contrapletal logic, and in fact, it actually is a possible perspective that provides assistance in obtaining a valid interpretation for God's נחם in vv. 11, 35 and is "non – נחם" in v. 29. The main problem is that Johnson assumes the lexical definition "change his mind" for נחם in each case. Johnson chooses the translation "repent" for נחם in v. 11 which he then demonstrates to be in parallel with Samuel's distress (תרה). In the same way, he chooses the translation "regret" for נחם in v. 35 to be contrasted with Samuel's "grief" (אבל).

<sup>181</sup> Samuel did not change his mind in the narrative. The point is made that Samuel, a sinful man, is very capable of a fleshly or whimsical "change of mind."

Because of the translations chosen for נחם (repent, regret), there is now a paradox because of the direct contradiction with the usage of נחם in v. 29. Johnson (2008:19) concludes that God changes his mind because of the actions of his children, and that to hold either view that God is a god who changes his mind or that he is a god who is unchanging and does not change his mind is in error. He holds that it is wrong to hold just one of these views in an “either-or” capacity. One must believe both truths about God simultaneously.

But, is this truly contrapletal logic? The idea of opposites existing under the same framework does not include those opposites working against each other but rather in conjunction with each other. Day is opposite of night, but there cannot be both day and night. They work together. What results is an antinomy, but not a paradox.<sup>182</sup>

The solution is again back to an exegetical approach that is combined with a thematic understanding of the Old Testament. If Parunak is correct, the word נחם should carry the main ideas of “comfort, compassion, or consolation.” We have also shown that with an understanding of “grace within judgment” as the theme of the Old Testament, both are readily available to people, and God is comforted with both. When this is applied to the text, there is no contradiction and opposites seem to work together in unity; God bringing Himself נחם for his glory. Judgment and grace (which are opposites) work together in unity for a common purpose. In this case the contrapletal logic is dealing with the same emotion (נחם) from different actions (judgment and grace). Since both are dispensed by God (like day and night), they work together in harmony to fulfil God’s purposes.

When viewed in this light, God’s emotions would be contrasted with both Samuel and Saul. In vv. 11 and 35, God would be comforted under fixed circumstances of judgment while Samuel is grieving for the “failure.” In v. 29, God is not comforting Himself by changing the circumstances unlike Saul who does so repeatedly. In this case, the uniqueness of Yahweh stands out and is highlighted.

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<sup>182</sup> The paradox that Johnson refers to is a real paradox in that it is a clear contradiction. J. I. Packer (1991:21) says, “Sheer paradox would thus have to be written off as sheer nonsense.” He goes on to describe what is possible, which is antinomy. An antinomy is the appearance of a contradiction, (1991:18).

### 5.3.4 The use of נחם in 1 Samuel 15

The verbal phrase נחמתני at the beginning of v. 11 is a performative perfect, which also appears in Ge 6:7 with God as the subject speaking in the first person (Tsumura, 2007:345-346). Since it is performative, in both places God is speaking in reference to an action being set in motion or confirmed, which is subsequent to an action that has already taken place.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>Genesis 6:6</b>  <sup>6</sup> And the LORD <u>was sorry</u> that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:6</b>  <sup>6</sup> וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה  כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ  וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לְבוֹ:</p>
<p><b>Genesis 6:7</b>  <sup>7</sup> And the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I <u>am sorry</u> that I have made them."</p>	<p><b>Genesis 6:7</b>  <sup>7</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֲמַחֶה אֶת־הָאָדָם  אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָאתִי מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ  מֵאָדָם עַד־בְּהֵמָה עַד־רֶמֶשׂ  וְעַד־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם  כִּי נִחַמְתִּי כִּי עָשִׂיתִם:</p>
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:11</b>  "I <u>regret</u> that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:11</b>  נִחַמְתִּי כִּי־הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת־שָׂאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ  כִּי־שָׁב מֵאַחֲרַי  וְאֶת־דְּבָרַי לֹא תָקִים  וַיַּחֲר לְשִׁמוּאֵל  וַיִּזְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה</p>
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:35</b>  And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD <u>regretted</u> that He had made Saul king over Israel.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:35</b>  וְלֹא־יָסַף שְׁמוּאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־שָׂאוּל  עַד־יוֹם מוֹתוֹ  כִּי־הִתְאָבַל שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׂאוּל  וַיְהִי נִחַם כִּי־הִמְלִיךְ אֶת־שָׂאוּל עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל</p>

In Ge 6:7, God נחמתני "comforts Himself"<sup>183</sup> on account of his past act of creating mankind, (כִּי־עָשָׂה אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּאָרֶץ) which was in a state of continuous intensive and extensive wickedness. Here in 1Sa 15:11, the concern is his past action of selecting Saul as king over Israel (כִּי־הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת־שָׂאוּל). Both past actions are described in

<sup>183</sup> The Hebrew verb נחמתני actually reads "I comforted myself" or "I am comforted."

noun clauses beginning with כִּי. The degree of similarity, however, does suggest a strong possibility that the writer is making a deliberate connection between the narratives (Bergen, 1996:170). The grammatical similarity in both cases is not just the form of the verb, but also the noun clause that follows.

As stated in Section 4.4.5.2.3, each of the four verses contains a כִּי clause which follows the finite verb allowing for two options in each case. The first option is when the conjunction כִּי is used as a noun clause, and the second is when it is used in a causal sense, where the clause is the cause of נחם without any regard to mental feeling of sorrow, regret, or remorse. The clause following כִּי then gives reason for the resulting נחם of Yahweh. This second option does not necessarily imply that emotions are not permissible, but just that the text is silent on the issue. This leaves open the distinct possibility that God will make decisions with full knowledge that his purpose and plan will cause self-inflicted pain.

A contrary position for 1Sa 15:11 is given by Döhling (2009:201), who provides two alternatives. The first alternative that he presents is similar to the first choice described above (and discussed in Section 4.4.5.2.3) in that the first כִּי is used as a noun clause and the second כִּי is causal “I regret that I made Saul king, because He has turned back from following Me...”. Because this interpretation takes God’s נחם as relating to a past event, he prefers taking both כִּי clauses as adverbial complements to the main verb נחם. The reason for this is that he sees that God’s and Saul’s actions are directly linked in a “partner” relationship, and that God’s נחם is a definite act of movement on God’s part to maintain his relationship with Israel. This view, however, lacks consistency for maintaining God’s full immutability, and therefore cannot be considered.

Döhling (2009:529) believes that God continually repents (Döhling refers to God as *Der bewegliche Gott*) in order to keep operating between his “poles” of justice and love. It is better, however, to see justice and love not as “poles” or “boundaries,” but rather as attributes to be on display. God is self-comforted whenever either his righteous justice or gracious love is being demonstrated.

Like Ge 6:6-7, the problem with the first option is a clear contradiction in the character, sovereignty, and omniscience of God. This would imply that He makes decisions with unintended or unwanted consequences. The first option of taking כִּי as introducing an

object noun clause in 1Sa 15:11, 35 is rejected on the basis of the *a-priori* position of God's full immutability and full sovereignty over his creation. The second option is preferred on the basis of holding to God's full immutability. In addition, with this view there is no theological contradiction with God being emotive or having feelings or emotions.<sup>184</sup> Also, the verb נחם is not a suitable verb of mental activity (Parunak, 1975:13), which takes an object clause, but is a verb of emotion.

If these verses in Genesis and 1 Samuel correspond syntactically, as suggested by Bergen (1996:170), then the exegesis should also be linked. As discussed in Section 5.1, in Ge 6:6-7, God is "grieved" in his heart in addition to feeling נחם. The cause of the emotion is the depravity of man, which is a condition rather than a specific act. The emotion is pain, anger, or even compassion for mankind because of the judgment that is about to be proclaimed.

God is pained by the judgment, but when He expresses עצב, it is his natural outrage against evil. He can feel "compassion" for mankind, as well as feel "comforted" by his total annihilation of all creation. In the same way, in Ge 6:7, God is "comforted" by the grace that He gave to Noah in the midst of judgment (v. 8). With the Genesis and Samuel passages syntactically and contextually associated, then the same markers should be present in both sets.

In 1Sa 15:11, God is "pained" by his selection of Saul as king. Identical to the passage in Ge 6:6-7, the pain is caused by an action that God had done. In Genesis, God created mankind, yet mankind failed God by choosing sin. In 1 Samuel, God selected Saul to be king, yet Saul failed God by choosing to disobey. Both scenarios which led to judgment resulted in God being נחם "comforted."

Further support for this view is offered by the LXX translation for נחם in 1Sa 15:11 as well as v. 35. In v. 11, the LXX uses the perfect middle for παρακαλεῖν "comfort." The word could also be translated as "called alongside," or "exhort." In all the Piel uses for נחם where παρακαλεῖν is used in the LXX the translation is "comfort." Given the context, and the verse's relation to Ge 6:6-7, this would be the best translation.

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<sup>184</sup> The distinction between verbs of emotion and mental activity is a semantical distinction, since grammatically both types of verbs may be regarded as a speech act, followed by וַיִּ and an object clause. Also note the lexical analysis of נחם in Chapter 4 of this study that demonstrates the sense "comfort" or "compassion" as the lexical boundaries in agreement with Parunak.

God “had comforted Himself” because He made Saul King over Israel. In isolation, this rendering is difficult, but makes sense when compared to the identical passage in 1Sa 15:35. In this verse, the LXX uses μεταμέλεσθαι “to change one’s mind.” The word can be used to express remorse and regret bringing about the change of mind, like Judas’ remorse in Mt 27:3. It mainly carries the idea of the emotional component involved in the change of mind.<sup>185</sup>

What makes the change in wording interesting, is that the last verse of the inclusio (v. 11 to v. 35) immediately precedes the introduction of and anointing of David as God’s choice for King. Immediately after the rejection of Saul and final statement of דָּן by Yahweh, the God of Israel not only provides them with a new king, but also initiates a king that will establish the line of the eternal king.

### **1 Samuel 16:1**

Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons."

The first occurrence of דָּן (παρακαλεῖν in v. 11) is translated “comforted Himself” which reflects the comfort that Yahweh receives in the deliberate judgment on Saul. That this is certain and deliberate is found in the dialogue between Samuel and Saul in vv. 22-29, and the loss that the prophet felt in v. 35. Yahweh comforts Himself in righteous judgment of sin. The second occurrence of דָּן (μεταμέλεσθαι in v. 35) is better translated “thought differently” that He made Saul King over Israel. Both verbs do not speak of Yahweh’s thoughts on Saul, but rather on Yahweh’s prior decision to enthrone Saul over Israel.

When the change in meaning of the two different verbs in the LXX is considered, the verses would be translated as follows:

### **1 Samuel 15:11**

*I comforted myself* that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.

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<sup>185</sup> As described in Section 4.5.1.1.4 of this study.

### 1 Samuel 15:35

And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death; for Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD *thought differently* that He had made Saul king over Israel.

As in Ge 6, the idea of “comfort” makes sense with God’s certain judgment of sin. The idea of “thinking differently” about Saul being King also makes sense when it alludes to the introduction of God’s choice – David. Even though the text specifies that God made Saul King over Israel, it is clear that it was the people’s choice to have a king over God (1Sa 8:7). Their request was sinful, yet in their sin God gave them what they asked for (Ps 106:13-15).

Their desire was to achieve what they perceived as success, with a secondary achievement of fellowship with God through their own choices and methods. This resulted in total failure, which was expected. God rightly judged the failure, and then provided grace in the midst of the judgment. The failure was not God’s, but actually belonged to the people, and God used this failure to let the people experience the consequences of sinful requests and inclinations. The grace was a grace that resulted not only in fellowship with God, but through the line of David, also resulted in a complete restoration of all redeemed humanity to God.

Samuel was in mourning over God’s judgment (v. 35), and this could possibly be an expression of compassion for Saul, or even fear of the future of Israel. The latter seems to be more in view with the emphasis in 1Sa 16:1. Yahweh tells Samuel to quit looking backward to Saul, and to anoint a new king, a king of Yahweh’s choosing. The nation receives grace, and its future will always be certain because of the promises of Yahweh.

While the LXX is not a final authority on the interpretation of the Hebrew נחם, it does provide insight into how the early translators chose to translate the Niphal נחם. This change of words in the LXX can be important. It is unfortunate that many modern versions choose the same word “regret” for both verses<sup>186</sup> when the LXX sees a different context for each verse. Yahweh is comforted in judging a rebellious king. Yahweh has a different thought about the choice of king and changes now from the people’s king to his king. By grace, He chooses a king who displays the feelings of his own heart. Israel is not lost, and will not be forsaken. The μεταμέλεσθαι in v. 35

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<sup>186</sup> So NIV, ESV, NASB, NAB, NKJ, NET, (both ASV and RSV use “repent” for both verses)

signals a change in kingship, but not a change in God's plan. It reveals a new thought in the unfolding drama of redemption.

In Ex 32, the idea of an intercessor / mediator was revealed through the dialogue between Yahweh and Moses. Here in 1 Samuel, the prophet Samuel is fulfilling that role leading to the additional revelation of God choosing the true mediator and redeemer. Through the mediator Samuel, God is now revealing that redemption, forgiveness, and leadership will be accomplished through a man of his choosing, and not a man who has earned accomplishments.

In addition to the specific choice of different words in the LXX, both verbs indicate a past tense. In v. 11, παρακαλεῖν is in the perfect tense, which generally indicates a past action with continuing results. The perfect tense in Greek is almost always exegetically significant whenever it is used and reflects a deliberate choice by the writer (Wallace, 1996:573). God began to comfort Himself before the disobedience of Saul.<sup>187</sup> The causal ὅτι (referencing the וְ clause in Hebrew) defines the source of the comfort – that God was the cause of making Saul king over Israel. The perfect tense indicates that the comfort and its cause were both simultaneous, which denies the idea of a “learning” God who participates with man's choices.

In v. 35, the aorist passive μεταμέλεσθαι indicates a past emotion involving a change in thinking. 1Sa 16:1 introduces the reader to David, and God's strong words to Samuel to quit thinking of Saul's future (or rather Israel's future without Saul). When this content is combined with v. 11, which indicates that God's action of נָחַם / παρακαλεῖν actually happened coetaneous with the choice of Saul, the conclusion is that God's action of נָחַם / μεταμέλεσθαι also happened along with the choice of Saul and not subsequent to it.

The kingship of Saul was built on a sinful request by the people, and with acquiescence, Yahweh gave them their request. By earthly and outward standards, Saul was a good choice. He was physically impressive, and initially humble. But, the relationship between Yahweh, the king, and the people was a conditional experiment

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<sup>187</sup> The perfect tense can be used to describe the present tense, or even the status quo describing a situation (Wallace, 1996:579-580). These are usually limited, however, to stative verbs. If the author was trying to describe the present situation, then the present tense would have been more clear. In this case, the exegetical significance of the less used perfect tense would indicate that the act of being passively comforted had occurred in the past, but the results of that comfort were still continuing.

that depended on total obedience. Davidic kingship, however, would rest on God's unconditional commitment and this choice would ultimately lead to a new basis for the role of the anointed redeemer. The role of the king did not rest on national or even individual obedience, but rather on God's faithfulness (Birch, 1998:1091).

It is interesting that even Open Theists acknowledge the absoluteness and resoluteness in God's moving to David as king. Fretheim (1985:596) says, "Unlike the fickleness so characteristic of human action, God has made a decision with respect to David, and with respect to that decision God will not repent." This was God demonstrating to the people the futility of their sinful request. This is why the rejection of Saul is given as unconditional (1Sa 15:23-29) as well as the establishment of and security of the Davidic kingdom.

The entire narrative about Saul is really about the unfolding failure that necessitates God's plan for who is to come – David (von Rad, 2001:325). Again, Terrence Fretheim (1985:601) affirms the covenantal context that governs the narrative:

*It is of great importance to recognize that God's primary concern in all of this is for the future of **Israel** (cf. 9:16; 10:1; 12:22). Saul's disobedience and other un-kingly behaviour may not seem to our minds to be sufficient justification for the divine rejection. But chaps. 13-15 (cf. 1Sa 28:18) would seem to be concerned to chart a trend or direction in the nature of Saul's kingship.*

Fretheim's perspective is influenced by his concept of a God who has limited foreknowledge, but that limitation is not necessarily present here. He is correct, however, in seeing the divine concern with a redeemed people as the governing issue. Since God's faithfulness and promises to the patriarchs regarding a redeemed people are the centre of his actions in Ex 32, that concern would naturally be present in his interaction with Samuel and Saul.

In v. 11, God's רַחַם "comfort" is based on the judgment that He gives to Saul and the nation Israel. The humanly selected king and sinful kingship is righteously rejected. In v. 35, when God does רַחַם it is his "compassion" on Israel by providing an unconditional kingship. God was "compassionate" and "thought differently" (μεταμέλεσθαι – the emotional component of changing how one thinks) about Israel. He was not going to provide another king in the order of Saul.

God's נָחַם in Ge 6:6-7 resulted in both judgment and a new beginning with Noah despite the fact that sin still permeated mankind (Ge 8:21-22). When God נָחַם in Ex 32:12-14, there was also judgment and a new beginning. In the same way, in 1 Samuel, God's נָחַם also results in judgment and in a new beginning based on God's covenant commitment, even in spite of a continuation of sin. David will also sin, and suffer the appropriate consequences (2Sa 11-20), but God's faithfulness will allow the lineage of God's anointed one to endure as the source of hope for Israel (Birch, 1998:1091-1092). What is revealed now, is a relationship that is not conditioned on obedience, but which is guaranteed by God's commitment.

## 5.4 Numbers 23:19

This last passage differs from the first three in that it states where God does not נָחַם. The difficulty with this passage (and its parallel passage 1Sa 15:29) is that it seems to contradict the other divine repentance passages (Ge 6:6-7; Ex 32:12-14; 1Sa 15:11. 35).

The context of Nu 23:19 is when the newly formed nation of Israel (about two million people) is moving about outside of Canaan, waiting for God to bring them into the land. The King of Moab – Balak, has hired a local diviner named Balaam to convince God to curse his people. On numerous occasions, Balaam set up sacrifices, and while he was alone he sought the counsel of God hoping that he could get God to curse Israel, and thus be handsomely rewarded. It is during one of these exchanges between God and Balaam that the pronouncement that God will not נָחַם like a man.

Although the context of Nu 23:19 is quite different than that of 1Sa 15:29, the verbiage of the two passages is almost identical. While the two declarations are almost diametrically opposed,<sup>188</sup> the illustration that God does not lie, or vacillate on prior decisions like men are identical.

The form of נָחַם in Nu 23:19 is in the Hithpael, which is primarily the reflexive of the intensive Piel stem (GKC, 149). Gesenius goes on to state that “it more often indicates an action less directly affecting the subject, and describes it as performed with regard to or for oneself, in one's own special interest” (GKC, 150). The subject here is

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<sup>188</sup> In Nu 23:19, God is saying that He will not נָחַם by going against his covenant with Israel, and in 1Sa 15:29, God declares that He will not remove his stated judgment from Saul.

described as a בן־אדם “son of man” and is used as a purpose clause. Men (all mankind) will lie, and they will also console themselves. They will manipulate circumstances (by lying) to improve their situation. In this sense, God will not lie or do anything to comfort Himself if the situation seems to be going wrong. God will not forget his covenant with Israel even if their behaviour hurts their relationship with Him. God’s word is still to be revered – even by God Himself, no matter the circumstances.

The main concern given by God in this verse is the immutability of God’s declared word (Allen, 1990:901), defined by the example given in v. 19b after the *athnach* under the verb וַיִּתְנַחֵם. The interrogative, “Did He say, and not do?” is followed by the repetition “And did He speak, and not cause it to rise up?” The suffix ending on the last verb קָם can refer to Israel, as the entire discussion is whether Yahweh will curse His people, the nation of Israel.

Yahweh has previously blessed his people, and Nu 23:20-21 shows that He cannot recall his former blessing. Unlike men, the God of Israel cannot be induced to break his word of promise, which is not a matter of question: it is a fact (Gray, 1976:351). The word of God is secure, and He is bound by his promises and decrees.

The first part of the verse (v. 19a) establishes a basic tenet of Hebrew thought: God and humankind are not equivalents (Ashley, 1993:477). Balaam is constantly squirming, shifting, and prevaricating to get what he wants. This is the main distinction between God and men. All men will change due to self-interest. Even with all his absolute power, God cannot change, (Ps 89:35-37) because He cannot deny Himself (Allen, 1990:901).

This passage uses נחם in the same way as 1Sa 15:29, in that it is being used synonymous with lying.<sup>189</sup> The contrast in both verses is set up to show the deep contrast between the human and the divine to emphasise that God is not bound to

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<sup>189</sup> 1Sa 15:29 has נחם in parallel with שקר and Num. 23:19 has נחם in parallel with כזב. Both שקר and כזב mean “to deal falsely” or “to lie.” They are close synonyms, but the verb שקר is especially used in the context of covenant breaking (TWOT, 2:955), while כזב stresses the actual act of lying (TWOT, 1:435-436).

human expectations and desires (Dozeman, 1998:187). The immutability of God's word, decrees, and purposes is so strong, that not even his servants<sup>190</sup> can change it.

In the Samuel-Saul narrative in 1Sa 15, there are two uses of נחם in v 29 that bring apparent difficulty. This is because they actually state the opposite of vv. 11 and 35 – the other two uses of the Niphal נחם with God as the subject in the 1 Samuel 15 pericope.

In 1Sa 15:29 Yahweh is given the title נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל “Glory of Israel,” an expression only found in this verse. The word נִצַּח “Glory” is not the traditional word for glory, but signifies constancy, endurance, and confidence (Smith, 2000:208; TWOT, 2:593).

The primary lexical and syntactical observation for the two uses of נחם in v. 29 is in their different constructions. Although both are in the Niphal stem, they are not in the same conjugations. The first use of נחם is a *yiqtol* that is in parallel with the *yiqtol* verb שקר “lie, deal falsely.” The second use of the verb נחם is an infinitive, and functions as a result clause of what would happen if Yahweh were a man “with the result that He should נחם.” The reason given for expressing נחם (like a man would נחם) is due to a change of mind or regret about a past act or declaration due to some external influence.

English	Hebrew
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:29</b>                      "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie                      or <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">change His mind</span>;                      for He is not a man                      that He should <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">change His mind</span>.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:29</b>                      וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקֵר                      וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם                      כִּי לֹא אָדָם                      הוּא לְהִנָּחֵם:</p>

The LXX has two different verbs for each use of נחם in 1Sa 29. The first is ἀποστρέφειν “turn away” and would indicate modifying, on appeal, a harsh judgment (Smith, 2000:208). The second Greek verb used for נחם is μετανοεῖν, “to change one’s mind, to repent” and would indicate a sort of repentance that involves new information. Even though he cannot accept the theology of 1 Samuel and sees the difficulty of the apparent contradiction so great that it must be a later insertion,

<sup>190</sup> Balaam is a “servant” in the sense that he carries out God's will and speaks God's word regardless of how he feels about the subject.

McCarter (1980:268) does see the clear meaning of these two occurrences of נחם in v. 29, and provides a good rendering with, “Yahweh has rejected you, and since Yahweh does not change his mind, there is no reason for further discussion.”

The name for God in this passage (נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל) shows that He is constant and eternal in his purposes and will not turn away from (נחם / ἀποστρέφειν) any prior decrees or purposes, which would amount to a lie. He is also not a man (nor thinks like a man) that He would (נחם / μετανοεῖν) change his mind based on a change in behaviour or listening to argumentation. God cannot be manipulated to go against his will. This statement is given with two pictures: Samuel eventually agreeing to walk out to the elders with Saul for public worship in a form of acceptance, and “relenting,” while God, the constant and resolute divine is not like a man (even like Samuel) and will not “relent.”

English	Hebrew
<p><b>1 Samuel 15:29</b>            "And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or <u>change His mind</u>;            for He is not a man            that He should <u>change His mind</u>.</p>	<p><b>1 Samuel 15:29</b>            וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקַר            וְלֹא יִנָּחַם            כִּי לֹא אָדָם            הוּא לְהִנָּחֵם:</p>
<p><b>Numbers 23:19</b>            "God is not a man, that He should lie,            Nor a son of man, that He should <u>repent</u>;            Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He            spoken, and will He not make it good?</p>	<p><b>Numbers 23:19</b>            לֹא אִישׁ אֵל וְיִכְזֹב            וּבֶן־אָדָם וְיִתְנַחֵם            הֲהוּא אָמַר וְלֹא יַעֲשֶׂה            וְדָבַר וְלֹא יִקְיִמְנֶה:</p>

Both uses of נחם in 1Sa 15:29 can be taken as “compassionate” in the way that God will not be compassionate on the guilty simply because of emotional pleading or remorse. The issue is not one of having compassion or not having compassion, but rather having compassion like a man. To do so would be to actually lie against all that He has said about his holiness and required obedience. A lie is a change from the truth. For God to be compassionate simply because of a better argument from the guilty would leave all humanity in the hands of a capricious god, prone to fits of unpredictable emotional fury and benevolence. Instead, God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Ex 33:19). It is by grace, and only by grace that compassion is given.

The issue in both passages is that God does not lie or alter his word as men do. Men change their minds, and in a way, change to what makes them comfortable. God does not comfort Himself in the flattering words or lying words of men, and thus change hoping to gain favour. Thus, in both of these passages the Niphal נִחַם is consistent in carrying the meaning of “comforting oneself” or “having compassion” in that God does not have compassion on someone just because of their convincing arguments; He does not comfort Himself by changing a decision to gain favour with someone.

## 5.5 Summary

Does God repent? Does He change his mind or regret? God is a God who glorifies Himself, and He exists to please Himself.

### **Psalm 135:6**

Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

In Genesis, God is seen as the Creator God, whose standard of holiness must be upheld. The sin in the Garden of Eden was dealt with perfectly; the decision was swift and just. God, however, is not only a God of holiness and righteousness; He is a God of mercy and lovingkindness. Because of his character, in the midst of righteous judgment, God extends the hand of grace – in the form of a coming redeemer.

This grace is especially seen in the patience and longsuffering of God in Ge 4-5 with ten generations of wickedness that encompassed the entire earth. With no hesitation, God judges that wicked world with a deluge. But in the midst of that righteous act, there is the introduction of mercy and grace on one man, which resulted in mercy and grace for all future mankind. The promise of redemption remains solid.

The theme of the polarity of judgment and grace continues in the Old Testament with Moses' prayer in Ex 32:12-14. God's character is on display, and He not only reveals that He is a God of grace, but also through the dialogue with Moses adds the idea of an intercessor. Genesis provided the picture of a redeemer through the ark and Noah's family. Here on the mountain, God provides the picture of an intercessor who pleads with God and understands the character of God. Judgment and mercy are both meted out on a rebellious people.

In 1Sa 15:11-35, the idea of an intercessor is again shown together with the נָחַם of God in the midst of judgment and grace. In this case, more specificity is given, in that the grace is shown to be God providing the forefather of the redeemer.<sup>191</sup> David, the man after God's own heart, is introduced in 1Sa 16 as the grace given to Israel. God's reflexive נָחַם<sup>192</sup> is in the midst of executing righteous judgment and extending marvellous grace. The instrument of that grace is becoming increasingly clear to be the face of the promised Redeemer.

By taking an approach that starts with the context and syntax before assessing a lexical meaning for נָחַם, there is no need to rely on anthropomorphism or anthropopathism to relieve an apparent theological paradox, and certainly there is no need to abandon the doctrine of full immutability and omniscience by allowing for a mutable God who is limited and frustrated by the choices of his creation.

The theologian who holds that God is not a god who reacts to external circumstances, can still hold that God does not get frustrated or weary (cf. Isa 40:27-31). God's goodness is maintained, since He righteously provides judgment to maintain his holiness and righteousness, but at the same time provides abundant grace to all who would receive it. In both cases, while pronouncing judgment on the wicked and grace on the undeserving, God looks at what He has done and comforts Himself. Either way, we the creatures will be involved in God comforting Himself for his glory. We must resolve ourselves as to whether we choose to bring comfort to God by staggering under his righteous judgment, or by walking in his lavish grace. Both are available in abundance.

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<sup>191</sup> Throughout the Old Testament, each of the kings of Judah are compared to "their father David." In Isa 11:1, the redeemer is said to be a root "from Jesse" and in 11:11, He is described as the "root of Jesse." In both cases, Jesse, David's father is integral to the line of the redeemer. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is frequently referred to as "Son of David" (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9).

<sup>192</sup> The reflexive form of the verb is expressed in the Niphal.

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

The pursuit of understanding the character and nature of God is of utmost importance in the realm of theology. Specifically, the area of God’s “repentance” or “non-repentance” has been a crucial issue for theologians in the twentieth century, and remains an enigma now one decade into the twenty-first century. As the acceptance of God’s passibility entered the twentieth century, questions of God’s interaction with his creation are begging to be asked—specifically questions that relate to God’s “repenting” from his decisions, “regretting” his prior actions or choices, or even “changing his mind.”

From the early twentieth century onwards, there have been various approaches to the question of God’s נחם in the divine repentance passages. Until the mid-twentieth century, the view of ascribing anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language for the Hebrew נחם has generally been the predominant view. Subsequent approaches have relied on metaphor theory and linguistic theory,<sup>193</sup> as well as a shift in hermeneutical presuppositions about God to arrive at a solution for God’s נחם in the divine repentance passages. With these differing views, and the inconclusive results obtained by etymology and lexical study, it is clear that the issue is hardly resolved.

### 6.1 The shifting views of God’s נחם

The findings of this study showed that prior to the twentieth century, the Hebrew Niphal נחם with God as the subject was to be translated “repent” and interpreted anthropomorphically or anthropopathically in the divine repentance passages. After the impassibility / passibility debate of the early twentieth century, theological presuppositions about God began to shift. What followed is that English Bible translations began to change.

Before the twentieth century, the prevailing translation of the Hebrew word נחם in the divine repentance passages was the English word “repent,” and it was considered an anthropopathism.

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<sup>193</sup> The study of the nature of language in general, and in this regard the nature of Biblical languages. See Chapter 2, and note Fretheim’s (1988:47-70) term of “God talk.”

The KJV translated the Hebrew נחם with some form of the verb “repent” for all of the “repentance of God” passages in Scripture. Using this Bible version as a benchmark, this study evaluated major English Bible translation’s interpretation of the Hebrew word נחם not only in the divine repentance passages, but in the entirety of its usage. While the evaluation did not look at every single English Bible translation, it did encompass most of the major English Bible translations, which included translations using differing translation methodologies. The goal of this survey was not to provide a technical analysis, but rather to observe any possible trends in the translation of the Hebrew word נחם in the “repentance of God” passages.

Out of thirteen translations in the last half of the twentieth century, over ninety–six percent of the English renderings of the divine repentance passages were changed to something different, preferring words that were more descriptive of emotional anguish. Rather than an anthropopathic “repent,” the idea was posited that now God was literally changing his mind due to circumstances, and was actually expressing some kind of remorse or grief due to human decisions and circumstances.

## **6.2 Approach**

### **6.2.1 A thematic approach to biblical theology**

This study was a biblical-theological and exegetical study. The thematic approach to the Old Testament by Walter Kaiser provided a solid foundation for understanding Old Testament theology. When his idea of “promise” or “promise-plan” was analysed and his critics evaluated, it was shown that Kaiser’s thematic approach needed to be further developed. The idea of “promise” by itself is not all-inclusive of the Old Testament, and a promise is meaningless unless it comes from a need for a promise. James Hamilton contributed to this idea through his thematic approach whereby God glorifies Himself in both judgment and salvation. This idea of a dual theme of judgment and grace provided the biblical-theological framework for the rest of this study.

## 6.2.2 Lexical study

The lexical part of this study was not forging new ground, but rather relied on the recent work of two scholars; H. Van Dyke Parunak and H. Simian-Yofre. Their methodology was surveyed and their conclusions summarised and synthesised.

As the study followed the findings of Parunak and Simian-Yofre with a more narrow lexical meaning of נחם (see Chapter 4), the dilemma of a fully immutable God's repentance and grieving became more visible. How is it possible for God to be comforted in the face of suffering and apparent failure? How is it possible for comfort to be in view in the midst of a devastating global flood, killing of people in the desert plains, or even the rejection of a king? How is it possible for God to be comforted when He has to change his plans because of the failure of his creation?

## 6.2.3 Exegetical study

The answers to these questions are founded on the premise that good theology derives from exegesis, and good exegesis is more than just lexical and syntactical work. A primary consideration for the exegesis is that it should be consistent within the framework of the theme of the Old Testament. In addition, because the theme shows an unfolding of God's "grace within judgment" each "repentance of God" passage should be in harmony with any antecedent and subsequent passages. In addition, one should possibly expect to see a further unfolding and describing of God's revelation of the promised redemption described in Ge 3:15.

### 6.2.3.1 Genesis 6:6-7

In the first passage, Ge 6:6-7, the main challenges against "comfort" being the meaning for נחם are threefold. First, God's נחם is activated when He looks at the complete and utter sinfulness of man throughout the earth. With this in view, secondly, He is grieved in his heart, showing a great pain and disappointment. And finally, in a deliberate act of judgment, God judges all living creatures (except for fish and sea creatures) that breathe the air by sending a global flood. In fact, God is so distraught over this that He mentions being נחם twice, once before announcing judgment, and once after (Westermann, 1984: 407).

The exegetical answers to these challenges were described in Chapter 5 and are briefly stated below:

1. The idea of God's נחם can only be understood through the first use of the word by Noah's father, Lamech. Lamech prophesied that Noah would bring נחם "comfort" to all mankind, and that comfort is from the curse that God put on the land. Noah is prophesied as bringing that נחם, and Noah survived the flood.
2. Noah's name נֹחַ means "rest" and is related to נחם specifically through assonance, and possibly through etymology. Noah and his actions are directly related to נחם for mankind.
3. When God "saw" the wickedness of man on the earth, this wickedness was no more wicked in intent or extent than the wickedness of Adam and Eve at the beginning. Ge 4 demonstrates that the heart of all mankind is evil to its core, by showing that people completely refuse to worship their God. God is not responding to an event; He is making a pronouncement where there can be no rebuttal.
4. The Hebrew עִצַּב "to be grieved, displeased" is in the reflexive Hithpael, which carries the meaning "to be vexed, angry." The anger that God was doing, He was doing to / for Himself. It was clearly the pronouncement in Ge 6:5 that provoked the anger of righteous judgment. God was now judging evil.
5. While it is clear that the text comments on God's נחם both before and after his pronouncement of judgment, which is thought to provide emphasis, a thorough reading of the text includes v. 8, which brings in the element of grace. Reading vv. 6-8 instead of vv. 6-7 shows that God is נחם both before judgment (the flood), and before grace (Noah).
6. The Hebrew word נֹחַ "rest" is the root for the name "Noah," and is also the root for the word הַנְּיִיחָה "soothing" found in Ge 8:21. Noah (rest) brought comfort, and God "rested" when He smelled the aroma.

7. When God stated<sup>194</sup> that the wickedness of man was irreparable, He flooded the earth and destroyed all life. He was עִצְבוּ “vexed” in his heart. In Ge 8:21, after the waters of the flood abated and Noah walked out of the ark, a sacrifice was made to God and He smelled a “soothing aroma” and was pleased. Regarding this sacrifice, there are two major observations. First, the flood waters receded before the sacrifice was given to God, so the sacrifice was not efficacious; and propitiation happened before the act of contrition. Second, in Ge 8:21 God makes a prolific announcement: Mankind is *still* evil “from his youth.” If the heart of mankind never changed, then how is God now satisfied, propitiated, and comforted? The answer is that God was comforted in Ge 6:7 — through his grace that He gave in the midst of that judgment.

The exegetical solution for Ge 6:6-7 is that God comforted Himself in his judgment on mankind, and He also comforted Himself in providing grace on that same human race through Noah. In this passage, it is abundantly clear that grace is found at the epicentre of judgment, which is the theme of the Old Testament.

#### **6.2.3.2 Exodus 32:12-14**

With this solution in mind, the events on the mountain in the second historical text (Ex 32:12, 14) become more clear. The LXX translation for both v. 12 (ἵλεως γίνου, “become merciful” (v. 12) and v. 14 (ἱλάσθη, “be propitiated”) provide the picture that God was propitiated (also meaning “satisfied”) and merciful because of the covenant given to Abraham.

What is significant in this passage is that Moses is revealed as a mediator. Where there was no prayer or intervention from anyone in Ge 6:6-7, the use of a divinely appointed mediator is now revealed. Even with this mediator, however, the judgment still commenced as thousands of people died, both by the hands of the Levites and by the hand of Yahweh Himself.

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<sup>194</sup> The text actually says, “saw,” but the exegetical conclusion is that God is stating an indicative fact.

God's נחם "self comfort" is a consistent emotion with a covenant keeping God, when He acts to maintain his covenant. The revelation of a mediator of both judgment and grace enhances the message that moves toward revealing the ultimate Mediator.

### **6.2.3.3 1 Samuel 15:11, 35**

In the third historical text in 1Sa 15, 11, 35, judgment is again in view with the rejection of Saul as Israel's king, and grace is in view with the deliberate selection and pronouncement of David as Israel's king. The man whom the people selected is out, and the man who God chose is in.

Additionally, this study found that the idea of contrapletal logic could also help describe the antinomy between God having נחם in 1Sa 15:11, 35 and his not having נחם in 1Sa 29. Contrapletal logic takes two apparent opposites, and shows that they work in harmony (like day and night or summer and winter) in a larger unity that includes both. The thematic approach of "grace within judgment" fits this perfectly. Both are apparent opposites, yet both are complementary in that they both supply glory to God. We see grace applied to Israel in 1Sa 15:35 and judgment applied to Saul in 1Sa 15:11, 29.

### **6.2.3.4 Numbers 23:19**

The final historical text is Nu 23:19, which also has a parallel passage in 1Sa 15:29. Nu 23:19 is a passage that merely describes what God will not do. He will not lie like a man, and he will not change his purposes like a man. The point is that his heart is set apart from man in every way. The nearly identical passage in 1Sa 15:29 also describes only what God will not do and will not feel, as opposed to defining his actions and emotions. The context for the Hebrew נחם in Nu 23:19 is the Moabite king, Balak, trying to persuade the prophet Balaam to convince God to curse Israel. God has already blessed his people, and will not go back on his blessing. He is not like a man to be "persuaded or convinced" to "change his mind or opinion" about his people.

In both contexts, this issue is the motive, or reason for God's not having נחם. He is certainly not prevented from expressing נחם, as evidenced by numerous biblical texts. Both passages speak of God not having נחם like a man, and both texts state the reason is to revoke a declared action, like his covenant with Israel, or declaration that Saul would be removed as king of Israel. The idea of having נחם carrying the meaning of "comfort" or even "compassion" in these two texts is consistent with the biblical theme

of judgment / grace. God does not comfort Himself by becoming mutable. The actions of mankind do not alter His will.

The additional revelation provided here is that God not only provides grace in the midst of judgment (Ge 6:6-7), and not only uses a mediator and intercessor (Ex 32:12, 14), but He Himself will provide the ultimate mediator, and it will be a man “after his own heart.” The removal of Saul and the selection of David is the foreshadowing of the coming seed, the coming redeemer, the greater David. Grace is always found in the midst of judgment.

In summary, the solution to the theological dilemma is that God’s comfort is not defined by circumstances. God comforts Himself in providing judgment, and God comforts Himself in providing grace. Both actions (providing judgment and providing grace by withholding judgment) demonstrate the character and fullness of God. Both actions are consistent with the attributes of God. God is comforted in diverse circumstances.

From Chapter 1, the research problem is as follows: Is it possible to harmonise the biblical texts that specifically speak of God’s repentance with those that affirm his non-repentance, full sovereignty, and immutability without using a hermeneutic of anthropopathism?

After applying a biblical-theological-exegetical methodology, the findings of this study can reply in the affirmative. In the divine repentance passages, the Hebrew נחם with God as the subject can take the meaning of “comfort” or “self-comfort” without creating a theological problem for God’s full immutability. He is passable (feeling emotion) and is consistent in his character by having the emotion “comfort” when He is providing actions of judgment as well as actions of grace.

God is a God of judgement, and a God of grace. While both of these actions seem paradoxical, they really demonstrate an antinomy. God’s grace is a grace that arises out of, or through his judgment. This antinomy of God’s judgment and grace is found in God’s statement to Moses.

### **Exodus 34:6-7**

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; <sup>7</sup> who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity,

transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

### **6.3 Recommendation for further study**

The first area of recommended study is to further explore the relationship between English Bible translations in the twentieth century and the debate regarding the doctrine of the impassibility of God. This study just remarked on the statistics without drawing conclusions on the direct cause or any undue influences. The evidence shows that there was a significant shift in the choice of English words, specifically for the Hebrew נָחַם in the Niphal with God as the subject. Are there other trends? Perhaps there are other significant changes that occurred that were influenced by other debates and shifting theological trends during the twentieth century.

A second area of study that could yield much benefit is to apply the same methodology of a biblical theological and exegetical approach to the many other passages in the Old Testament that contain the Hebrew נָחַם in the Niphal with God as the subject. Among those are passages like Jer 18:7-10 and Am 7:1-6 that indicate that God possibly changes his mind or repents.

The final area of further research could be in the text of Ge 6:1-4 with the "Sons of God." While this topic has been covered in a fairly extensive manner, to date there has not been an exegetical study that combines with biblical theology, and specifically with a thematic approach to the Old Testament. Perhaps a study could focus on the impact of the passage if viewed through the lens of the theme of "grace within judgment." Is God doing something more than just commenting on the Nephilim and its origins – followed by a flood? Could God be protecting the promised seed (Ge 3:15) from Satan's counterfeit seeds (supernatural blending with the natural) by eliminating all but the "pure" line? There is much to be gleaned from conducting a biblical-theological and exegetical study.

### **6.4 Applications drawn**

For almost five hundred years after the Reformation, the orthodox view of God in the "repentance of God" passages held that God was fully immutable and impassable, and that the Hebrew word נָחַם translated "repent" was to be interpreted

anthropopathically. At the dawn of the twentieth century, doubt began to arise about the nature of God.

Over the course of the last century, that definition of an impassable God had changed, and altered the orthodox perspective relative to these “repentance of God” passages. The problem is now for the committed Calvinist, who is also committed to the doctrine of full immutability. Is there a solid exegetical answer in response to those who combine the present reality of circumstances with these difficult texts to arrive at conclusions that either reduce or eliminate the full immutability of God?

The question for us today is not one of what, but of how: “How should we respond?” In other words, “What do we believe about the nature of God?” Does God not look with a kind eye to those who are suffering under his judgment? Should we believe that God cannot really predict or control his judgment because of the unpredictable actions of people? Do we have a god who is frustrated when his plans don’t work out?

The application for us today is in our response to God, especially in prayer. If we are certain that God is both unchanging and good, we can take comfort in the fact that while we might not fully understand our circumstances, we can look to a God who is transcendent above those circumstances, yet is also imminent in our circumstances to not leave us alone. He does intervene for our good—He gives grace.

God’s נחם is actually one of certainty (in both judgment and grace). Circumstances (even his own righteous judgment on sinners) do not affect God in any way, and they do not frustrate God. Knowing this, and knowing that the world has been standing in the waters of God’s judgment since the first transgression in Ge 3:6, what is the most encouraging and comforting thought in the midst of great difficulty?

Our comfort is God’s comfort (נחם): God’s grace in the midst of his judgment.

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## **Appendix A**

### **A Survey of English Translations of נחם**

The usage and translation of the Hebrew word נחם can be traced through a sampling of English Bible translations and versions. The Bible versions used in the study comprised a sample taken from Bibles that were published from the Reformation era through the twenty-first century. While there were English Bible translations in existence prior to the Reformation era, the focus is largely on translations that were taken directly from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. In addition, several modern translations<sup>195</sup> that are considered more of a paraphrase with less focus on original languages were also used to compare how the Hebrew word נחם is considered in the “freer” versions.

Generally, there are two different types of translation methodology: word for word (often referred to as formal equivalence) and dynamic equivalence (often referred to as functional equivalence).

A formal-equivalence translation concerns itself primarily with accuracy to the original text, and seeks as close a match as possible between the elements of the receptor language and those of the source language. A functional-equivalence translation is more concerned with readability, and seeks to convey the thought of the original languages with the greatest possible clarity with little attention given to a word-for-word correspondence between the original and the translation (Thomas, 2000:89-90).

Paraphrase Bible versions<sup>196</sup> restate a text or passage in another form or with other words (Ryken, 2009:104). It is difficult to classify English translations with a specific or particular translation methodology. This is because all Bibles versions tend to lie on a spectrum or continuum of methodology, and at times will employ various methodologies. No Bible version is one hundred percent formal equivalent or

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<sup>195</sup> Normally, a paraphrase version of the Bible would not be called a “translation,” but since it is difficult and not entirely without opposition to label a particular Bible as being in a specific category of translation, this study uses the terms “Bible translation” and “Bible version” as synonymous. Some of these would include The Message, The Living Bible, and Good News Bible. Some people see Bibles like the New Living Translation and New International Version as a kind of “hybrid” which might use both formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence translation methodologies, as well as utilizing paraphrasing in places.

<sup>196</sup> A paraphrase Bible version is not a “translation,” as it does not usually consult the original languages as source material.

functional equivalent. Translations are more inclined to one or the other method, varying even from passage to passage. This study acknowledges that the English translations used may not necessarily be categorized, but can be described by a particular methodology. The main point is that the study used a diversity of English translations, with a diversity of translation methodology.

The various samples were taken from Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant translations.

**Note:**

In various passages, the Hebrew word נחם was not translated, or the idea was incorporated into a prior phrase or clause. This usually happens when there are two statements in parallel that say the same thing, and the translators apparently took the statement as a hendiadys. When this occurred, the translation appears as a black box, meaning that there is no specific direct English translation for that particular use of the Hebrew word נחם.

## **Formal-Equivalence Translation Methodology**

### **Jewish**

- Jewish Publication Society (OT)—JPS
- Tanakh—TNK
- Complete Jewish Bible—CJB

### **Catholic**

- Douay-Rheims American Bible—DRA
- New American Bible—NAB
- New Jerusalem Bible—NJB

### **Protestant**

- King James Version—KJV
- American Standard Version—ASV
- Revised Standard Version—RSV
- New American Standard Version—NASB
- New Revised Standard Version—NRSV
- English Standard Version—ESV

## **Functional Equivalence Translation Methodology**

- New International Version—NIV
- New English Translation—NET
- New Living Translation—NLT

## **Paraphrase Bible Versions**

- The Living Bible—TLB
- Good News Bible—GNB
- The Message—MSG

## English Translations Listed by Date

- Geneva Bible 1599
- King James Version 1611
- Webster Bible 1833
- English Revised Version 1885
- Young's Literal Translation 1898
- Douay-Rheims American Bible 1899
- American Standard Version 1901
- Jewish Publication Society Bible 1917
- Revised Standard Version 1952
- New American Bible 1970
- New American Standard Bible 1971
- The Living Bible 1971
- Good News Bible 1976
- New International Version 1984
- Tanakh 1985
- New Jerusalem Bible 1985
- New Revised Standard Bible 1989
- New English Translation 1995
- New Living Translation 1996
- Complete Jewish Bible 1998
- English Standard Version 2001
- The Message 2001

# English Formal Equivalence Translations (Jewish)

## Sorted by Bible Verse

Verse	Stem	JPS—1917	TNK—1985	CJB—1998
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	relief	comfort
Ge 6:6	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
Ge 6:7	Niphal	repenteth	regret	regret
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comforted	comfort	comfort
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	comfort	consoling	comforting
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	comfort	Comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	be comforted	be comforted	consolation
Ge 38:12	Niphal	comforted	mourning	comforted
Ge 50:21	Piel	comforted	speak kindly	comforted
Ex 13:17	Niphal	repent	change heart	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	repent	renounce	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	repented	renounced	changed mind
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	repent	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	repent	revenge	take pity
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	repented	moved to pity	moved to pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	repented	relented	became sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	repented	relented	still sorry
Ru 2:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	repenteth	regret	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	repent	repent	change mind
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
2Sa 10:2	Piel	comfort	condolence	comfort
2Sa 10:3	Piel	comforters	condolence	comfort
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comforted	consoled	comforted
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	comforted	gotten over	filled with longing
2Sa 24:16	Niphal	repented	renounced	changed mind
1 Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	condolences	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	condolences	comfort
1Ch 19:3	Piel	comforters	condolences	comfort
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	repented	renounced	changed mind
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	consolation	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	comforteth	consoles	comforts
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	relent	repent
Job 42:11	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 23:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	reassure
Ps 69:20	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Ps 90:13	Niphal	repent	show mercy	take pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	repented	repented	relented
Ps 110:4	Niphal	repent	relent	retract
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comforted	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	repent	take satisfaction	take pity
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforter	comfort	comfort
Isa 1:24	Niphal	ease me	get satisfaction	free myself
Isa 12:1	Piel	comfortest	comfort	comforting
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comforting
Isa 49:13	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforting
Isa 51:3	Piel	comforted	comforted	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	comforted	comforted	comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	comforteth	comforts	comforts
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted

Isa 54:11	Pual	comforted	comforted	consoled
Isa 57:6	Niphal	pacify	relent	ignore
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforteth	comforts	comforted
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 66:13	Pual	comforted	comfort	comforted
Jer 4:28	Niphal	repented	relent	change mind
Jer 8:6	Niphal	repenteth	regrets	repents
Jer 15:6	Niphal	repenting	relent	sparing
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repent	change mind	relent
Jer 18:10	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
Jer 20:16	Niphal	repented	relenting	mercy
Jer 26:3	Niphal	repent	renounce	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	repent	renounce	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	repented	renounced	relented
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comforted
Jer 31:19	Niphal	repented	remorse	repented
Jer 42:10	Niphal	repent	regret	relenting
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comforter	comfort	console
La 1:16	Piel	comforter	comforter	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	console
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	Eased	vent fury	satisfied
Eze 14:22	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Eze 14:23	Piel	comfort	consoled	consoled
Eze 16:54	Piel	comfort	comfort	shield
Eze 24:14	Niphal	repent	relent	relent
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Hos 13:14	NOUN	repentance	revenge	compassion
Joel 2:13	Niphal	repenteth	renouncing	change mind
Joel 2:14	Niphal	repent	relent	change mind
Amos 7:3	Niphal	repented	relented	change mind
Amos 7:6	Niphal	repented	relented	change mind
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	repent	relent	relent
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	repented	renounced	relented
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	repentest	renouncing	relent
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comforters	comfort	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 8:14	Niphal	repented	relent	relent
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	console	comfort

## Sorted by Hebrew Stem

Verse	Stem	JPS—1917	TNK—1985	CJB—1998
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	comfort	consoling	comforting
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	be comforted	be comforted	consolation
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	repent	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	repent	revenge	take pity
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comforted	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	repent	take satisfaction	take pity
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	Eased	vent fury	satisfied
Ge 6:6	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
Ge 6:7	Niphal	repenteth	regret	regret
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comforted	comfort	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	comforted	mourning	comforted
Ex 13:17	Niphal	repent	change heart	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	repent	renounce	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	repented	renounced	changed mind
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	repented	moved to pity	moved to pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	repented	relented	became sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	repented	relented	still sorry
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	repenteth	regret	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	repent	repent	change mind
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	comforted	gotten over	filled with longing
2Sa 24:16	Niphal	repented	renounced	changed mind
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	repented	renounced	changed mind
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	relent	repent
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comfort
Ps 90:13	Niphal	repent	show mercy	take pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	repented	repented	relented
Ps 110:4	Niphal	repent	relent	retract
Isa 1:24	Niphal	ease me	get satisfaction	free myself
Isa 57:6	Niphal	pacify	relent	ignore
Jer 4:28	Niphal	repented	relent	change mind
Jer 8:6	Niphal	repenteth	regrets	repents
Jer 15:6	Niphal	repenting	relent	sparing
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repent	change mind	relent
Jer 18:10	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
Jer 20:16	Niphal	repented	relenting	mercy
Jer 26:3	Niphal	repent	renounce	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	repent	renounce	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	repented	renounced	relented
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comforted
Jer 31:19	Niphal	repented	remorse	repented
Jer 42:10	Niphal	repent	regret	relenting
Eze 14:22	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Eze 24:14	Niphal	repent	relent	relent
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Joel 2:13	Niphal	repenteth	renouncing	change mind
Joel 2:14	Niphal	repent	relent	change mind
Amos 7:3	Niphal	repented	relented	change mind
Amos 7:6	Niphal	repented	relented	change mind
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	repent	relent	relent
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	repented	renounced	relented
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	repentest	renouncing	relent
Zec 8:14	Niphal	repented	relent	relent
Hos 13:14	NOUN	repentance	revenge	compassion
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	relief	comfort
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	comforted	speak kindly	comforted
Ru 2:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
2Sa 10:2	Piel	comfort	condolence	comfort
2Sa 10:3	Piel	comforters	condolence	comfort
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comforted	consoled	comforted
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	condolences	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	condolences	comfort

1Ch 19:3	Piel	comforters	condolences	comfort
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	consolation	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	comforteth	consoles	comforts
Job 42:11	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 23:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	reassure
Ps 69:20	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforter	comfort	comfort
Isa 12:1	Piel	comfortest	comfort	comforting
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comforting
Isa 49:13	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforting
Isa 51:3	Piel	comforted	comforted	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	comforted	comforted	comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	comforteth	comforts	comforts
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforteth	comforts	comforted
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comforter	comfort	console
La 1:16	Piel	comforter	comforter	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	console
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	comfort	consoled	consoled
Eze 16:54	Piel	comfort	comfort	shield
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comforters	comfort	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	comforted	comforted	consoled
Isa 66:13	Pual	comforted	comfort	comforted

# English Formal Equivalence Translations (Catholic)

## Sorted by Bible Verse

Verse	Stem	DRA—1899	NAB—1970	NJB—1985
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	relief	consolation
Ge 6:6	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
Ge 6:7	Niphal	repenteth	sorry	regret
Ge 24:67	Niphal	sorrow	solace	console
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	threateneth	settle accounts	take revenge
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	comfort	consolation	be comforted
Ge 38:12	Niphal	comfort	mourning	comforted
Ge 50:21	Piel	comforted	speak kindly	speak affectionately
Ex 13:17	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	be appeased	relent	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	appeased	relented	relented
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	be changed	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	have mercy	have pity	have pity
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	moved to mercy	took pity	relented
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	repentance	disconsolate	felt sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	very sorry	disconsolate	felt sorry
Ru 2:13	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
1Sa 5:11	Niphal	repenteth	regret	regret
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	repentance	repent	go back on his word
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	repent	repent	go back on his word
1Sa 5:35	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
2Sa 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	condolence
2Sa 10:3	Piel	comforters	condolence	sympathy
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comforted	comforted	consoled
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	comforted	reconciled	gotten over death
2Sa 4:16	Niphal	had pity	regretted	felt sorry
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comforted	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	condolences
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	condolences
1Ch 19:3	Piel	comforters	consolers	sympathy
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	took pity	decided against calamity	felt sorry
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	consolation
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	comfort	consolation
Job 29:25	Piel	comforter	took comfort	I led them
Job 42:6	Niphal	penance	repent	repent
Job 42:11	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 23:4	Piel	comforted	give courage	soothe
Ps 69:20	Piel	comfort	comforters	consolers
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Ps 86:17	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Ps 90:13	Niphal	be entreated	have mercy	show mercy
Ps 106:45	Niphal	repented	relented	relented
Ps 110:4	Niphal	repent	waver	retract
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	consolation
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	have pity
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	be entreated	show mercy	feel compassion
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Ecc 4:1	Piel	help	comforter	comfort
Isa 1:24	Niphal	Comfort	get vengeance	get the better of
Isa 12:1	Piel	comforted	consoled	comforted
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Isa 40:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Isa 49:13	Piel	comforted	comforts	consoles
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	comfort	has pity
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	have pity	has pity
Isa 51:12	Piel	comfort	comfort	consoler
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	comfort	console
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	comforts	consoles

Isa 54:11	Pual	comfort	consoled	pitied
Isa 57:6	Niphal	angry	punish	appease
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 66:13	Pual	comforted	comfort	comforted
Jer 4:28	Niphal	repented	repent	change mind
Jer 8:6	Niphal	penance	repents	repents
Jer 15:6	Niphal	entreating	sparing	relenting
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repent	repent	change mind
Jer 18:10	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
Jer 20:16	Niphal	repented	relentlessly	mercy
Jer 26:3	Niphal	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	repented	repented	relented
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	consoled	comforted
Jer 31:19	Niphal	penance	repentance	repented
Jer 42:10	Niphal	appeased	regret	sorry
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comforter	console	comfort
La 1:16	Piel	comforter	console	comforter
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	comforted	appeased	avenged
Eze 14:22	Niphal	comforted	consoled	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Eze 16:54	Piel	comforting	comfort	console
Eze 24:14	Niphal	be pacified	repent	compassion
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comforted	consoled	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comfort
Hos 13:14	NOUN	comfort	compassion	compassion
Joel 2:13	Niphal	repent	relenting	relents
Joel 2:14	Niphal	forgive	relent	relent
Amos 7:3	Niphal	had pity	repented	relented
Amos 7:6	Niphal	had pity	repented	relented
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	forgive	forgive	change mind
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	had mercy	repented	relented
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	easy to forgive	loathe to punish	relents
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comforter	console	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 8:14	Niphal	mercy	relent	relent
Zec 10:2	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort

## Sorted by Hebrew Stem

Verse	Stem	DRA—1899	NAB—1970	NJB—1985
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	threateneth	settle accounts	take revenge
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	comfort	consolation	be comforted
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	be changed	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	have mercy	have pity	have pity
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	be entreated	show mercy	feel compassion
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	comforted	appeased	avenged
Ge 6:6	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
Ge 6:7	Niphal	repenteth	sorry	regret
Ge 24:67	Niphal	sorrow	solace	console
Ge 38:12	Niphal	comfort	mourning	comforted
Ex 13:17	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	be appeased	relent	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	appeased	relented	relented
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	moved to mercy	took pity	relented
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	repentance	disconsolate	felt sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	very sorry	disconsolate	felt sorry
1Sa 5:11	Niphal	repenteth	regret	regret
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	repentance	repent	go back on his word
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	repent	repent	go back on his word
1Sa 5:35	Niphal	repented	regretted	regretted
2Sa13:39	Niphal	comforted	reconciled	gotten over death
2Sa 4:16	Niphal	had pity	regretted	felt sorry
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	took pity	decided against calamity	felt sorry
Job 42:6	Niphal	penance	repent	repent
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comforted	consoled	consoled
Ps 90:13	Niphal	be entreated	have mercy	show mercy
Ps 106:45	Niphal	repented	relented	relented
Ps 110:4	Niphal	repent	waver	retract
Isa 1:24	Niphal	Comfort	get vengeance	get the better of
Isa 57:6	Niphal	angry	punish	appease
Jer 4:28	Niphal	repented	repent	change mind
Jer 8:6	Niphal	penance	repents	repents
Jer 15:6	Niphal	entreating	sparing	relenting
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repent	repent	change mind
Jer 18:10	Niphal	repent	change mind	change mind
Jer 20:16	Niphal	repented	relentlessly	mercy
Jer 26:3	Niphal	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	repented	repented	relented
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	consoled	comforted
Jer 31:19	Niphal	penance	repentance	repented
Jer 42:10	Niphal	appeased	regret	sorry
Eze 14:22	Niphal	comforted	consoled	comfort
Eze 24:14	Niphal	be pacified	repent	compassion
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comforted	consoled	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comfort
Joel 2:13	Niphal	repent	relenting	relents
Joel 2:14	Niphal	forgive	relent	relent
Amos 7:3	Niphal	had pity	repented	relented
Amos 7:6	Niphal	had pity	repented	relented
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	forgive	forgive	change mind
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	had mercy	repented	relented
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	easy to forgive	loathe to punish	relents
Zec 8:14	Niphal	mercy	relent	relent
Hos 13:14	NOUN	comfort	compassion	compassion
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	relief	consolation
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	comforted	speak kindly	speak affectionately
Ru 2:13	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
2Sa 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	condolence
2Sa 10:3	Piel	comforters	condolence	sympathy
2Sa12:24	Piel	comforted	comforted	consoled
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comforted	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	condolences
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	condolences
1Ch 19:3	Piel	comforters	consolers	sympathy

Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	consolation
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	comfort	consolation
Job 29:25	Piel	comforter	took comfort	I led them
Job 42:11	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 23:4	Piel	comforted	give courage	soothe
Ps 69:20	Piel	comfort	comforters	consolers
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	consolation
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	have pity
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Ecc 4:1	Piel	help	comforter	comfort
Isa 12:1	Piel	comforted	consoled	comforted
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Isa 40:1	Piel	comforted	comfort	console
Isa 49:13	Piel	comforted	comforts	consoles
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	comfort	has pity
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	have pity	has pity
Isa 51:12	Piel	comfort	comfort	consoler
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	comfort	console
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	comforts	consoles
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comforter	console	comfort
La 1:16	Piel	comforter	console	comforter
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Eze 16:54	Piel	comforting	comfort	console
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comforter	console	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 10:2	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	comfort	consoled	pitied
Isa 66:13	Pual	comforted	comfort	comforted

# English Formal Equivalence Translations (Protestant)

## Sorted by Bible Verse

Verse	Stem	KJV	ASV	RSV	NASB	NRSV	ESV
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	comfort	bring relief	give rest	bring relief	bring relief
Ge 6:6	Niphal	repent	repent	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	repent	repent	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	console	comfort
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	time of mourning was ended	time of mourning was ended	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted	comfort	reassured	comfort
Ex 13:17	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	repent	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	repent	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	repent	repent	move to pity	move to pity	move to pity	move to pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	repent	repent	compassion	was sorry	compassion	compassion
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	repent	repent	compassion	was sorry	compassion	compassion
Ru 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	regret	regret	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	regret
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	regret	was sorry	regret
2Sa 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
2Sa 10:3	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters	consolers	messengers with condolences	comforters
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
2Sa24:16	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
1Ch 19:3	Piel	comforter	comforter	consoler	comforter	comforter	comforter
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	was sorry	relent	relent
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter
Job 16:2	Piel	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent
Job 42:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 23:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 69:20	Piel	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 90:13	Niphal	repent	repent	have pity	be sorry	compassion	have pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	relent	compassion	relent
Ps 110:4	Niphal	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	change mind	change mind
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 1:24	Niphal	ease	ease	vent wrath	be relieved	pour out wrath	ease
Isa 12:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort

Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 57:6	Niphal	comfort	appeased	appeased	relent	appeased	relent
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Pual	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 4:28	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent	relent
Jer 8:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	relent
Jer 15:6	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent	relent
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Jer 18:10	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	think better of	change mind	relent
Jer 20:16	Niphal	repent	repent	pity	relent	pity	pity
Jer 26:3	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	change mind	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:19	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	relent
Jer 42:10	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	am sorry	relent
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:16	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	satisfy myself	appeased	satisfy myself	satisfy myself
Eze 14:22	Niphal	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	console	console
Eze 14:23	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	console	console
Eze 16:54	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
Eze 24:14	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	be sorry	relent
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
Hos 13:14	NOUN	repent	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Joel 2:13	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
Joel 2:14	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
Amos 7:3	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Amos 7:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	repent	repent	turn	relent	change mind	relent
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 8:14	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent	relent
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	console	comfort

## Sorted by Hebrew Stem

Verse	Stem	KJV	ASV	RSV	NASB	NRSV	ESV
Ge 27:42	Hiithpael	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	console	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hiithpael	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Nu 23:19	Hiithpael	repent	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hiithpael	repent	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Ps 119:52	Hiithpael	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hiithpael	repent	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Eze 5:13	Hiithpael	comfort	comfort	satisfy myself	appeased	satisfy myself	satisfy myself
Ge 6:6	Niphal	repent	repent	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	repent	repent	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	time of mourning was ended	time of mourning was ended	comfort
Ex 13:17	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	repent	repent	move to pity	move to pity	move to pity	move to pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	repent	repent	compassion	was sorry	compassion	compassion
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	repent	repent	compassion	was sorry	compassion	compassion
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	regret	regret	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	regret
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	regret	was sorry	regret
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
2Sa24:16	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	was sorry	relent	relent
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 90:13	Niphal	repent	repent	have pity	be sorry	compassion	have pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	relent	compassion	relent
Ps 110:4	Niphal	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	change mind	change mind
Isa 1:24	Niphal	ease	ease	vent wrath	be relieved	pour out wrath	ease
Isa 57:6	Niphal	comfort	appeased	appeased	relent	appeased	relent
Jer 4:28	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent	relent
Jer 8:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	relent
Jer 15:6	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent	relent
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Jer 18:10	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	think better of	change mind	relent
Jer 20:16	Niphal	repent	repent	pity	relent	pity	pity
Jer 26:3	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	change mind	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	change mind	change mind	relent
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:19	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	relent
Jer 42:10	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	am sorry	relent
Eze 14:22	Niphal	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	console	console
Eze 24:14	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	be sorry	relent
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort
Joel 2:13	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
Joel 2:14	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
Amos 7:3	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Amos 7:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	repent	repent	turn	relent	change mind	relent
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	change mind	relent
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	repent	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent
Zec 8:14	Niphal	repent	repent	relent	relent	relent	relent
Hos 13:14	NOUN	repent	repent	compassion	compassion	compassion	compassion
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	comfort	bring relief	give rest	bring relief	bring relief
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted	comfort	reassured	comfort
Ru 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
2Sa 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
2Sa 10:3	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters	consolers	messengers with condolences	comforters
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	console	comfort

1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
1Ch 19:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
1Ch 19:3	Piel	comforter	comforter	consoler	comforter	comforter	comforter
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 42:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 23:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 69:20	Piel	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter	comforter
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 12:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:16	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	console	console
Eze 16:54	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	console	console	console
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	console	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Pual	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort	comfort

# English Functional Equivalence Translations

## Sorted by Bible Verse

Verse	Stem	NIV—1984	NET—1995	NLT—1996
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	comfort	relief
Ge 6:6	Niphal	grieved	regretted	sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	grieved	regret	sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comfort
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	consoling	get revenge	consoling
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	comforted	consoled	comforted
Ge 38:12	Niphal	recovered from grief	consoled	time of mourning is over
Ge 50:21	Piel	reassured	consoled	reassured
Ex 13:17	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	relent	relent	change mind
Ex 32:14	Niphal	relented	relented	change mind
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	change mind	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	compassion	change plans	change mind
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	compassion	felt sorry	took pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	grieved	regretted	felt sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	grieved	regretted	felt sorry
Ru 2:13	Piel	comfort	encouraged	comforted
1Sa 5:11	Niphal	grieved	regret	sorry
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
1Sa 5:35	Niphal	grieved	regretted	sorry
2Sa 10:2	Piel	sympathy	sympathy	sympathy
2Sa 10:3	Piel	sympathy	sympathy	honor
2Sa12:24	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
2Sa13:39	Niphal	consoled	consoled	longed to be reunited
2Sa24:16	Niphal	grieved	relented	relented
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	express sympathy	express sympathy	express sympathy
1Ch 19:2	Piel	express sympathy	express sympathy	
1Ch 19:3	Piel	express sympathy	express sympathy	honor your father
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	grieved	relented	relented
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	console	console
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	console	console	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	comforts	comforts	comforted
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repentance
Job 42:11	Piel	consoled	consoled	comforted
Ps 23:4	Piel	comfort	reassure	comfort
Ps 69:20	Piel	comforters	comforters	comfort
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 86:17	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Ps 90:13	Niphal	compassion	have pity	take pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	relented	relented	relented
Ps 110:4	Niphal	change mind	revoke	break vow
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comfort	console	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	compassion	compassion	compassion
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comfort	comforting	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforter	delivers	powerless
Isa 1:24	Niphal	get relief	vengeance	revenge
Isa 12:1	Piel	comforted	consoled	comfort
Isa 22:4	Piel	console	console	console
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	compassion	compassion	compassion
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	compassion	console	take pity
Isa 51:12	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 51:19	Piel	console	console	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	consoles	comforted

Isa 54:11	Pual	not comforted	unconsoled	desolate
Isa 57:6	Niphal	relent	vengeance	make happy
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	console	tell
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforts	consoles	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	consoled	
Isa 66:13	Pual	comfort	console	comforts
Jer 4:28	Niphal	relent	relent	change
Jer 8:6	Niphal	repents	regrets	sorry
Jer 15:6	Niphal	compassion	sorry	give another chance
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repents	stops	renounces
Jer 18:10	Niphal	reconsider	cancel	not bless
Jer 20:16	Niphal	without pity	without mercy	without mercy
Jer 26:3	Niphal	relent	forgo	change mind
Jer 26:13	Niphal	relent	forgo	change mind
Jer 26:19	Niphal	relent	forgo	change mind
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comforted
Jer 31:19	Niphal	beat breast	repented	sorry
Jer 42:10	Niphal	grieved	sorrow	sorry
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comfort	comfort	lift her out
La 1:16	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comforts
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	avenged	appeased	satisfied
Eze 14:22	Niphal	consoled	consoled	feel better
Eze 14:23	Piel	consoled	console	understand
Eze 16:54	Piel	comfort	consoling	feel good
Eze 24:14	Niphal	relent	sorry	pity
Eze 31:16	Niphal	consoled	comforted	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	consoled	consoled	comfort
Hos 13:14	NOUN	compassion	compassion	take pity
Joel 2:13	Niphal	relents	relenting	relent
Joel 2:14	Niphal	have pity	grant reprieve	give reprieve
Amos 7:3	Niphal	relented	decided not to do	relented
Amos 7:6	Niphal	relented	decided not to do	relented
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	compassion	relent	change mind
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	compassion	relented	change mind
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	relents	relents	turn back
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	regret
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 8:14	Niphal	show pity	sorry	change mind
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort

## Sorted by Hebrew Stem

Verse	Stem	NIV—1984	NET—1995	NLT—1996
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	consoling	get revenge	consoling
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	comforted	consoled	comforted
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	change mind	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	compassion	change plans	change mind
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comfort	console	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	compassion	compassion	compassion
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	avenged	appeased	satisfied
Ge 6:6	Niphal	grieved	regretted	sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	grieved	regret	sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	recovered from grief	consoled	time of mourning is over
Ex 13:17	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	relent	relent	change mind
Ex 32:14	Niphal	relented	relented	change mind
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	compassion	felt sorry	took pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	grieved	regretted	felt sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	grieved	regretted	felt sorry
1Sa 5:11	Niphal	grieved	regret	sorry
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
1Sa 5:29	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
1Sa 5:35	Niphal	grieved	regretted	sorry
2Sa13:39	Niphal	consoled	consoled	longed to be reunited
2Sa24:16	Niphal	grieved	relented	relented
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	grieved	relented	relented
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	repent	repentance
Ps 77:2	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comforted
Ps 90:13	Niphal	compassion	have pity	take pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	relented	relented	relented
Ps 110:4	Niphal	change mind	revoke	break vow
Isa 1:24	Niphal	get relief	vengeance	revenge
Isa 57:6	Niphal	relent	vengeance	make happy
Jer 4:28	Niphal	relent	relent	change
Jer 8:6	Niphal	repents	regrets	sorry
Jer 15:6	Niphal	compassion	sorry	give another chance
Jer 18:8	Niphal	repents	stops	renounces
Jer 18:10	Niphal	reconsider	cancel	not bless
Jer 20:16	Niphal	without pity	without mercy	without mercy
Jer 26:3	Niphal	relent	forgo	change mind
Jer 26:13	Niphal	relent	forgo	change mind
Jer 26:19	Niphal	relent	forgo	change mind
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	comforted	comforted
Jer 31:19	Niphal	beat breast	repented	sorry
Jer 42:10	Niphal	grieved	sorrow	sorry
Eze 14:22	Niphal	consoled	consoled	feel better
Eze 24:14	Niphal	relent	sorry	pity
Eze 31:16	Niphal	consoled	comforted	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	consoled	consoled	comfort
Joel 2:13	Niphal	relents	relenting	relent
Joel 2:14	Niphal	have pity	grant reprieve	give reprieve
Amos 7:3	Niphal	relented	decided not to do	relented
Amos 7:6	Niphal	relented	decided not to do	relented
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	compassion	relent	change mind
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	compassion	relented	change mind
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	relents	relents	turn back
Zec 8:14	Niphal	show pity	sorry	change mind
Hos 13:14	NOUN	compassion	compassion	take pity
Ge 5:29	Piel	comfort	comfort	relief
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	reassured	consoled	reassured
Ru 2:13	Piel	comfort	encouraged	comforted
2Sa 10:2	Piel	sympathy	sympathy	sympathy
2Sa 10:3	Piel	sympathy	sympathy	honor
2Sa12:24	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	express sympathy	express sympathy	express sympathy
1Ch 19:2	Piel	express sympathy	express sympathy	
1Ch 19:3	Piel	express sympathy	express sympathy	honor your father

Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	console	console
Job 7:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comforters	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	console	console	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	comforts	comforts	comforted
Job 42:11	Piel	consoled	consoled	comforted
Ps 23:4	Piel	comfort	reassure	comfort
Ps 69:20	Piel	comforters	comforters	comfort
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comfort	comforting	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	comforter	delivers	powerless
Isa 12:1	Piel	comforted	consoled	comfort
Isa 22:4	Piel	console	console	console
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	compassion	compassion	compassion
Isa 51:3	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	compassion	console	take pity
Isa 51:12	Piel	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 51:19	Piel	console	console	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	consoles	comforted
Isa 61:2	Piel	comfort	console	tell
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforts	consoles	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	consoled	
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	comfort	comfort	lift her out
La 1:16	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comforts
La 1:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	consoled	console	understand
Eze 16:54	Piel	comfort	consoling	feel good
Nah. 3:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	regret
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	not comforted	unconsoled	desolate
Isa 66:13	Pual	comfort	console	comforts

# English Paraphrase Versions

## Sorted by Bible Verse

Verse	Stem	TLB—1971	GNB—1976	MSG—2001
Ge 5:29	Piel	relief	relief	give us a break
Ge 6:6	Niphal	sorry	sorry	Sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	sorry	sorry	Sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comfort	comforted	comfort
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	life was threatened	planning to get even	plotting vengeance
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael		comforted	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	time of mourning is over	finished the time of mourning	time of mourning is over
Ge 50:21	Piel	reassuring	reassured	reassured
Ex 13:17	Niphal	discouraged	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	turn away	change mind	think twice
Ex 32:14	Niphal	change mind	change mind	think twice
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	change mind	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	compassion	have Mercy	compassion
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	moved to pity	have Mercy	compassion
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	deep sadness	felt sorry	were sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	sad time	felt sorry	felt bad
Ru 2:13	Piel	good to me	feel better	touched my heart
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	sorry	sorry	sorry
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	lying	change mind	dither
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	change mind	change mind	says what he means and means what he says
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	sorry	sorry	sorry
2Sa 10:2	Piel	regrets	sympathy	condolences
2Sa 10:3	Piel	honor	sympathy	comforters
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	reconciled	filled with longing	come to terms with
2Sa 24:16	Niphal	sorry	change mind	felt the pain
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	sympathy	sympathy	condolences
1Ch 19:2	Piel			
1Ch 19:3	Piel	honor	sympathy	comforters
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel		rest	lift my spirits
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comfort	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel		comfort	establish the mood
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	repent	sorry
Job 42:11	Piel	comforting	comforted	consoled
Ps 23:4	Piel	guarding and guiding	protect	feel secure
Ps 69:20	Piel	comfort	comfort	shoulder to cry on
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	be tender
Ps 77:2	Niphal	no joy for me	comfort	didn't believe
Ps 86:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	put me back on my feet
Ps 90:13	Niphal	turn away	have pity	show kindness for a change
Ps 106:45	Niphal	relented	relented	took them by the hand
Ps 110:4	Niphal	rescind	take it back	take it back
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	know I'm on the right track
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	hold me tight
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	help	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	compassion	take pity	holds the hands
Ecc 4:1	Piel	helping	help	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel		help	rescue
Isa 1:24	Niphal		take revenge	get off my back
Isa 12:1	Piel	comforts	comfort	comforted
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	tell me it's going to be alright
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 51:3	Piel	bless	compassion	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	make blossom		comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	comforts	strengthens	comforting
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	sympathy	comfort

Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 54:11	Pual	troubled	comfort	unpitied
Isa 57:6	Niphal	make me happy	pleased	
Isa 61:2	Piel	tell	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comforts
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Pual			comforted
Jer 4:28	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
Jer 8:6	Niphal	sorry	sorry	regret
Jer 15:6	Niphal	give another chance	controlling anger	letting you off the hook
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	care
Jer 18:8	Niphal	not do as I had planned	I will not do what I said	think twice
Jer 18:10	Niphal	change mind	I will not do what I said	think again
Jer 20:16	Niphal	without mercy	without mercy	
Jer 26:3	Niphal	withhold punishment	change mind	reconsider
Jer 26:13	Niphal	cancel punishment	change mind	reconsider
Jer 26:19	Niphal	held back punishment	change mind	call off
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	comforted	solace
Jer 31:19	Niphal	sorry	wanted to return	repented
Jer 42:10	Niphal	sorry	caused me sorrow	feel deep compassion
La 1:2	Piel	help	comfort	hold her hand
La 1:9	Piel	lift her out	comfort	hold her hand
La 1:16	Piel	comforter	comfort	cares for my soul
La 1:17	Piel	comforts	help	helped
La 1:21	Piel	help	comfort	cares
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 5:13	Hithpaal	be appeased	I am satisfied	calm down
Eze 14:22	Niphal	know it was right	justified	know was worth it
Eze 14:23	Piel	you will agree	you will know	feel better
Eze 16:54	Piel	consolation	show how well	comfort
Eze 24:14	Niphal		be merciful	change mind
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comforted	be pleased	relieved
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comforted	comfort	comfort
Hos 13:14	NOUN	relent	have pity	regret
Joel 2:13	Niphal	anxious not to punish	forgive	cancel catastrophe
Joel 2:14	Niphal	decide to let you alone	change mind	show pity
Amos 7:3	Niphal	relented	change mind	
Amos 7:6	Niphal	turned	change mind	gave in
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	hold back	change mind	change mind
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	abandoned his plan	change mind	change mind
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	cancel your plans	change mind	turn your plans
Nah. 3:7	Piel	regrets	comfort	second look
Zec 1:17	Piel	comfort	help	comfort
Zec 8:14	Niphal	change mind	change mind	pull my punches
Zec 10:2	Piel	comfort	comfort	nothing but smoke

## Sorted by Hebrew Stem

Verse	Stem	TLB—1971	GNB—1976	MSG—2001
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	life was threatened	planning to get even	plotting vengeance
Ge 37:35	Hithpael		comforted	comfort
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	change mind	change mind	change mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	compassion	have Mercy	compassion
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	comfort	comfort	know I'm on the right track
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	compassion	take pity	holds the hands
Eze 5:13	Hithpael	be appeased	I am satisfied	calm down
Ge 6:6	Niphal	sorry	sorry	Sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	sorry	sorry	Sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	comfort	comforted	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	time of mourning is over	finished the time of mourning	time of mourning is over
Ex 13:17	Niphal	discouraged	change mind	change mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	turn away	change mind	think twice
Ex 32:14	Niphal	change mind	change mind	think twice
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	moved to pity	have Mercy	compassion
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	deep sadness	felt sorry	were sorry
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	sad time	felt sorry	felt bad
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	sorry	sorry	sorry
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	lying	change mind	dither
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	change mind	change mind	says what he means and means what he says
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	sorry	sorry	sorry
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	reconciled	filled with longing	come to terms with
2Sa 24:16	Niphal	sorry	change mind	felt the pain
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
Job 42:6	Niphal	repent	repent	sorry
Ps 77:2	Niphal	no joy for me	comfort	didn't believe
Ps 90:13	Niphal	turn away	have pity	show kindness for a change
Ps 106:45	Niphal	relented	relented	took them by the hand
Ps 110:4	Niphal	rescind	take it back	take it back
Isa 1:24	Niphal		take revenge	get off my back
Isa 57:6	Niphal	make me happy	pleased	
Jer 4:28	Niphal	change mind	change mind	change mind
Jer 8:6	Niphal	sorry	sorry	regret
Jer 15:6	Niphal	give another chance	controlling anger	letting you off the hook
Jer 18:8	Niphal	not do as I had planned	I will not do what I said	think twice
Jer 18:10	Niphal	change mind	I will not do what I said	think again
Jer 20:16	Niphal	without mercy	without mercy	
Jer 26:3	Niphal	withhold punishment	change mind	reconsider
Jer 26:13	Niphal	cancel punishment	change mind	reconsider
Jer 26:19	Niphal	held back punishment	change mind	call off
Jer 31:15	Niphal	comforted	comforted	solace
Jer 31:19	Niphal	sorry	wanted to return	repented
Jer 42:10	Niphal	sorry	caused me sorrow	feel deep compassion
Eze 14:22	Niphal	know it was right	justified	know was worth it
Eze 24:14	Niphal		be merciful	change mind
Eze 31:16	Niphal	comforted	be pleased	relieved
Eze 32:31	Niphal	comforted	comfort	comfort
Joel 2:13	Niphal	anxious not to punish	forgive	cancel catastrophe
Joel 2:14	Niphal	decide to let you alone	change mind	show pity
Amos 7:3	Niphal	relented	change mind	
Amos 7:6	Niphal	turned	change mind	gave in
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	hold back	change mind	change mind
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	abandoned his plan	change mind	change mind
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	cancel your plans	change mind	turn your plans
Zec 8:14	Niphal	change mind	change mind	pull my punches
Hos 13:14	NOUN	relent	have pity	regret
Ge 5:29	Piel	relief	relief	give us a break
Ge 37:35	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	reassuring	reassured	reassured
Ru 2:13	Piel	good to me	feel better	touched my heart
2Sa 10:2	Piel	regrets	sympathy	condolences
2Sa 10:3	Piel	honor	sympathy	comforters
2Sa 12:24	Piel	comforted	comforted	comforted
1Ch 7:22	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	sympathy	sympathy	condolences
1Ch 19:2	Piel			

1Ch 19:3	Piel	honor	sympathy	comforters
Job 2:11	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel		rest	lift my spirits
Job 16:2	Piel	comforters	comfort	comforters
Job 21:34	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel		comfort	establish the mood
Job 42:11	Piel	comforting	comforted	consoled
Ps 23:4	Piel	guarding and guiding	protect	feel secure
Ps 69:20	Piel	comfort	comfort	shoulder to cry on
Ps 71:21	Piel	comfort	comfort	be tender
Ps 86:17	Piel	comfort	comfort	put me back on my feet
Ps 119:76	Piel	comfort	comfort	hold me tight
Ps 119:82	Piel	comfort	help	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	helping	help	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel		help	rescue
Isa 12:1	Piel	comforts	comfort	comforted
Isa 22:4	Piel	comfort	comfort	tell me it's going to be alright
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 51:3	Piel	bless	compassion	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	make blossom		comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	comforts	strengthens	comforting
Isa 51:19	Piel	comfort	sympathy	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	comforted	comfort	comforted
Isa 61:2	Piel	tell	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comforts
Isa 66:13	Piel	comforted	comfort	comfort
Jer 16:7	Piel	comfort	comfort	care
Jer 31:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:2	Piel	help	comfort	hold her hand
La 1:9	Piel	lift her out	comfort	hold her hand
La 1:16	Piel	comforter	comfort	cares for my soul
La 1:17	Piel	comforts	help	helped
La 1:21	Piel	help	comfort	cares
La 2:13	Piel	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	you will agree	you will know	feel better
Eze 16:54	Piel	Consolation	show how well	comfort
Nah. 3:7	Piel	Regrets	comfort	second look
Zec 1:17	Piel	Comfort	help	comfort
Zec 10:2	Piel	Comfort	comfort	nothing but smoke
Isa 54:11	Pual	Troubled	comfort	unpitied
Isa 66:13	Pual			comforted

## Appendix B

### Summary of Meanings of תָּנַח by Translation Family

Words Used	English Translations of Jewish Bibles			English Translations of Catholic Bibles		
	JPS-1917	TNK-1985	CJB-1998	DRA-1899	NAB-1970	NJB-1985
Repent	42	2	3	18	14	3
Penance	0	0	0	3	0	0
Relent	0	14	12	0	6	15
Regret	0	6	4	0	5	4
Change Mind	0	5	13	1	3	8
Renounce	0	10	0	0	0	0
Sorry	0	0	2	2	1	5
Grief	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pity	0	1	4	4	2	1
Mercy	0	1	1	4	2	2
Appeased	0	2	1	4	1	1

Words Used	Major Protestant Formal Equivalence Translations					
	KJV-1611	ASV-1901	RSV-1952	NASB-1971	NRSV-1989	ESV-2001
Repent	41	41	26	5	3	1
Penance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relent	0	0	4	6	8	25
Regret	0	0	0	0	0	0
Change Mind	0	0	1	9	16	3
Renounce	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sorry	0	0	2	6	5	2
Grief	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pity	0	0	3	1	2	3
Mercy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Appeased	0	1	2	1	2	1

Words Used	Functional Equivalence English Translations			English Paraphrase Version		
	NIV-1984	NET-1995	NLT-1996	BBE-1949	GWN-1995	MSG-2002
Repent	3	2	1	0	0	1
Penance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Relent	13	10	6	0	0	0
Regret	0	6	0	0	0	2
Change Mind	5	7	15	21	28	7
Renounce	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sorry	0	5	9	3	5	6
Grief	9	0	0	0	0	0
Pity	3	1	4	4	2	1
Mercy	0	0	1	1	2	0
Appeased	1	0	1	0	0	0

### Translation of the Hebrew **נחם** in the Repentance Passages in the English Bible Versions (pre-1950 / post-1950)

	<b>Ge 6:6</b>	<b>Ge 6:7</b>	<b>Ex 32:12</b>	<b>Ex 32:14</b>	<b>1Sa 15:11</b>	<b>1Sa 15:29</b>	<b>1Sa 15:29</b>	<b>1Sa 15:35</b>	<b>Nu 23:19</b>
GB — 1599	repented	repent	change mind	change mind	repenteth	repent	repent	repented	repent
KJV — 1611	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent
WEB — 1833	repented	repent	repent	repented	repent	repent	repent	repented	repent
ERV — 1885	repented	repenteth	repent	repented	repenteth	repent	repent	repented	repent
YLT — 1898	repenteth	repented	repent	repenteth	repented	repent	be penitent	repented	repenteth
DRA — 1899	repented	repenteth	be appeased	appeased	repenteth	repentance	repent	repented	be changed
ASV — 1901	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent
JPS — 1917	repented	repenteth	repent	repented	repenteth	repent	repent	repented	repent
RSV — 1952	was sorry	was sorry	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent	repent
NAB — 1970	regretted	sorry	relent	relented	regret	repent	repent	regretted	change mind
NASB — 1971	was sorry	was sorry	change mind	change mind	regret	change mind	change mind	regret	repent
TLB — 1971	sorry	sorry	turn away	change mind	sorry	lying	change mind	sorry	change mind
GNB — 1976	sorry	sorry	change mind	change mind	sorry	change mind	change mind	sorry	change mind
NIV — 1984	grieved	grieved	relent	relented	grieved	change mind	change mind	grieved	change mind
TNK — 1985	regretted	regret	renounce	renounce	regret	repent	change mind	regretted	change mind
NJB — 1985	regretted	regret	relent	relented	regret	go back on his word	go back on his word	regretted	change mind
NRSV — 1989	was sorry	was sorry	change mind	change mind	regret	change mind	change mind	was sorry	change mind
NET — 1995	regretted	regret	relent	relented	regret	change mind	change mind	regretted	change mind
NLT — 1996	sorry	sorry	change mind	change mind	sorry	change mind	change mind	Sorry	change mind
CJB — 1998	regretted	regret	change mind	change mind	regret	change mind	change mind	regretted	change mind
ESV — 2001	was sorry	was sorry	relent	relent	regret	regret	regret	regret	change mind
MSG — 2001	sorry	sorry	think twice	think twice	sorry	dither	says what he means and means what he says	Sorry	change mind

# Appendix C

## The LXX Translation Summary of ΠΝ with English Translations

### Sorted by Bible Verse

Verse	Hebrew Stem	LXX	KJV	RSV	ESV
Ge 5:29	Piel	διαναπαύω	comfort	bring relief	bring relief
Ge 6:6	Niphal	ἐνθυμέομαι	repent	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	θυμῶ	repent	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	ἀπειλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 37:35	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforted	comforted	comfort
Ex 13:17	Niphal	μεταμέλω	repent	repent	change of mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	γίνομαι	repent	repent	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	ἰλάσκομαι	repent	repent	relent
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	ἀπειλέω	repent	repent	change of mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	repent	have compassion	have compassion
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	move to pity	move to pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	compassion	compassion
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	compassion	compassion
Ru 2:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	repent	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	regret
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	repent	regret
2Sa 10:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
2Sa 10:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforters	comforters	comforters
2Sa 12:24	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
2Sa 24:16	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	repent	relent
1Ch 7:22	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
1Ch 19:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
1Ch 19:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforter	consoler	comforter
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	repent	relent
Job 2:11	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforter	comforter	comforter
Job 21:34	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 42:6	Niphal	τήκω ἠγέομαι	repent	repent	repent
Job 42:11	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 23:4	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 69:20	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforter	comforter	comforter
Ps 71:21	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 77:2	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort

Ps 90:13	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	have pity	have pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	relent	relent
Ps 110:4	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	change of mind	change of mind
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	comfort	have compassion	have compassion
Ecc 4:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 1:24	Niphal	παύω	ease	vent wrath	ease
Isa 12:1	Piel	ἐλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 22:4	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	ἐλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:19	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	ἐλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 57:6	Niphal	οὐκ ὀργίζω	comfort	be appeased	relent
Isa 61:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Pual	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 4:28	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	relent	relent
Jer 8:6	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 15:6	Niphal	οὐκέτι ἀνίημι	repent	relent	relent
Jer 16:7	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 18:8	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 18:10	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 20:16	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	pity	pity
Jer 26:3	Niphal	παύω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	παύω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	παύω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 31:13	Piel	ποιέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:15	Niphal	παύω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:19	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 42:10	Niphal	ἀναπαύω	repent	repent	relent
La 1:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:16	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:21	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 2:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 5:13	Hithpael		comfort	satisfy myself	satisfy myself
Eze 14:22	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	comfort	console	console
Eze 14:23	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
Eze 16:54	Piel	παροργίζω με	comfort	console	console
Eze 24:14	Niphal	ἐλεέω	repent	repent	relent
Eze 31:16	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort

Eze 32:31	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Hos 13:14	NOUN	παρακαλέω	repent	compassion	compassion
Joel 2:13	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Joel 2:14	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Amos 7:3	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Amos 7:6	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	turn	relent
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	repent	relent
Nah. 3:7	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	έλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 8:14	Niphal	μετανοέω	repent	relent	relent
Zec 10:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	comfort

## Sorted by Hebrew Stem

Verse	Hebrew Stem	LXX	KJV	RSV	ESV
Ge 27:42	Hithpael	ἀπειλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 37:35	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Nu 23:19	Hithpael	ἀπειλέω	repent	repent	change of mind
Dt 32:36	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	repent	have compassion	have compassion
Ps 119:52	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 135:14	Hithpael	παρακαλέω	comfort	have compassion	have compassion
Eze 5:13	Hithpael		comfort	satisfy myself	satisfy myself
Ge 6:6	Niphal	ἐνθυμέομαι	repent	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 6:7	Niphal	θυμῶ	repent	was sorry	was sorry
Ge 24:67	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 38:12	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ex 13:17	Niphal	μεταμέλω	repent	repent	change of mind
Ex 32:12	Niphal	γίνομαι	repent	repent	relent
Ex 32:14	Niphal	ἰλάσκομαι	repent	repent	relent
Jdg 2:18	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	move to pity	move to pity
Jdg 21:6	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	compassion	compassion
Jdg 21:15	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	compassion	compassion
1Sa 15:11	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	repent	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	regret
1Sa 15:29	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	regret
1Sa 15:35	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	repent	regret
2Sa 13:39	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
2Sa 24:16	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	repent	relent
1Ch 21:15	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	repent	relent
Job 42:6	Niphal	τήκω ἠγέομαι	repent	repent	repent
Ps 77:2	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 90:13	Niphal	παρακαλέω	repent	have pity	have pity
Ps 106:45	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	relent	relent
Ps 110:4	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	change of mind	change of mind
Isa 1:24	Niphal	παύω	ease	vent wrath	ease
Isa 57:6	Niphal	οὐκ ὀργίζω	comfort	be appeased	relent
Jer 4:28	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	relent	relent
Jer 8:6	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 15:6	Niphal	οὐκέτι ἀνίημι	repent	relent	relent
Jer 18:8	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 18:10	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 20:16	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	repent	pity	pity
Jer 26:3	Niphal	παύω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:13	Niphal	παύω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 26:19	Niphal	παύω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 31:15	Niphal	παύω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:19	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Jer 42:10	Niphal	ἀναπαύω	repent	repent	relent
Eze 14:22	Niphal	μεταμέλομαι	comfort	console	console
Eze 24:14	Niphal	ἐλεέω	repent	repent	relent
Eze 31:16	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 32:31	Niphal	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Joel 2:13	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Joel 2:14	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent

Amos 7:3	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Amos 7:6	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Jon. 3:9	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	turn	relent
Jon. 3:10	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Jon. 4:2	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	repent	relent
Zec 8:14	Niphal	μετανόω	repent	relent	relent
Hos 13:14	NOUN	παρακαλέω	repent	compassion	compassion
Ge 5:29	Piel	διαναπαύω	comfort	bring relief	bring relief
Ge 37:35	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ge 50:21	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforted	comforted	comfort
Ru 2:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
2Sa 10:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
2Sa 10:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforters	comforters	comforters
2Sa 12:24	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 7:22	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
1Ch 19:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
1Ch 19:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
1Ch 19:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforter	consoler	comforter
Job 2:11	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 7:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 16:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforter	comforter	comforter
Job 21:34	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 29:25	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Job 42:11	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 23:4	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 69:20	Piel	παρακαλέω	comforter	comforter	comforter
Ps 71:21	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 86:17	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:76	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ps 119:82	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Ecc 4:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 12:1	Piel	έλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 22:4	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 40:1	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 49:13	Piel	έλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:3	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:12	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 51:19	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 52:9	Piel	έλεέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 61:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 16:7	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Jer 31:13	Piel	ποιέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:9	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:16	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:17	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
La 1:21	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort

La 2:13	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Eze 14:23	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	console
Eze 16:54	Piel	παροργίζω με	comfort	console	console
Nah. 3:7	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 1:17	Piel	ἐλέεω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Zec 10:2	Piel	παρακαλέω	comfort	console	comfort
Isa 54:11	Pual	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort
Isa 66:13	Pual	παρακαλέω	comfort	comfort	comfort