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# A STUDY OF GOD'S ENCOUNTER WITH ABRAHAM IN GENESIS 18:1-15 AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE ABRAHAM NARRATIVE

by

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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| BASOR | Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research |
| BJC | British Journal of Sociology |
| CBQ | Catholic Biblical Quarterly |
| INT | Interpretation |
| IJPR | International Journal for Psychology of Religion |
| JBL | Journal of Biblical Literature |
| JEA | Journal of Egyptian Archaeology |
| JSOT | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament |
| KJV | King James Version |
| KTU | Keilalphabetische Texte aus Ugarit |
| LXE | Brenton's English Translation of the Septuagint (LXX) |
| LXX | Septuagint |
| MT | Massoretic Text |
| Niphal | Simple Passive Form of Hebrew Verb |
| NIV | New International Version |
| Qal | Simple Active Form of Hebrew Verb |
| RTR | The Reformed Theological Review |
| TDOT | Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament |
| Tybul | Tyndale Bulletin |
| VT | Vetua Testamentum |
| Vulgate | The Latin Vulgate Bible by Saint Jerome |

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|---|---|
| YLT | 1898 Young's Literal Translation by Robert Young |
| ZAW | Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |

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# Summary

* Title: **A STUDY OF GOD'S ENCOUNTER WITH ABRAHAM IN GENESIS 18:1-15 AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE ABRAHAM NARRATIVE**

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The present work is a new attempt to interpret on the episode in Genesis 18:1-15 by the method of narrative criticism. The general tendency on the narrative had focused on the exemplary act of Abraham's hospitality interpreting it as his righteousness by the perspective of NT (Heb 13:2) or by the test motive of Greek Myth (the birth of Orion). The retributive theology was considered too much in interpreting the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15).These interpretations conflict with the narrator's own theological views: (1) righteousness by faith (Gn 15:6), (2) God's mercifulness to save Lot (Gn 19:29), and (3) God's being gracious to make Sarah conceive (Gn 21:1).

This study attempts to find out the author's own interpretative view indicated in the whole Abraham narrative (Gn 11:27-25:11) as well as in the Fellowship Narrative itself (Gn 18:1-15).The present work is an attempt to interpret on the narrative by the method of narrative criticism. This study pays attention to the narrator's various literary skills: "linking structure with preceding episode" (Gn 18:1a); "Sandwiched structure" of the larger context (Gn 18:1-21:*7*); Unique Plot Sequence; and Repeated Clue word and

phrase (“laugh,” “Sarah,” ”this time next year”). These literary skills are understood to indicate the faithfulness of the Lord who tries to fulfill what he promised. The conclusion of this study overturns the traditional interpretations on the Fellowship Narrative.

This work attests that Abraham showed his righteousness not by doing hospitality but by obeying God’s new command of circumcision out of willing heart as he used to obey the Lord’s commands having faith in the promise of the Lord (ch.5.3.2.2). The motive of God’s visit is to have the covenantal fellowship with obedient Abraham (ch. 2.1.6; 2.1.6.1). Abraham’s first moment recognition of deity is attested by interpreting of the technical pair verb, “And he lifted up his eyes and he saw and Lo!” (Gn 18:2a), which depicts prophetic experience of Abraham (ch.3.3). Abraham’s manner for the visitors is relevant to the higher ones (ch.3.3.2.1).

The futile human endeavor without having faith is considered as the reason of being delayed of fulfillment of God’s promise (Gn 16). The fulfillment of the promised son was not attained by any human effort, but only by God’s merciful intervention in the Abraham narrative (ch. 4.4.4 and 4.4.5).

# Key Words

**Ancient Near Eastern**: The Ancient Near East refers to early civilizations within a region roughly corresponding to the modern Middle East: Mesopotamia (modern Iraq and northeastern Syria), ancient Egypt, ancient Iran (Elam, Media and Persia), Armenia, Anatolia (modern Turkey) and the Levant (modern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus).

**Anthropomorphic Characterization of the Lord:** The term Anthropomorphism refers to the perception of a divine being in human form. In the Hebron narrative (Gn 18:1-33), the Lord acts just like real human being. He eats food, talks to Abraham face to face, and walks along with Abraham. The divine character in anthropomorphic narratives is commonly understood as the personal God who longs to relate himself to his people.

**Covenantal faithfulness of the Lord:** The term (`tm,a/` or `hn"Wma`) means God's unchangeableness or immutability in special relation to His gracious promises for His covenantal partners. The term is often linked with His steadfast-love (`ds,x,`). Therefore, covenantal faithfulness of the Lord is understood as the divine exercise of "steadfast-love" for His covenantal people. The Lord intervenes in human history to save His people from natural disasters, the hostilities of enemies and any personal weaknesses. Therefore, the execution of God's covenant faithfulness is understood also as His showing righteousness, for He carries out what he promised as an obligation.

**Gradations of Persian etiquette:** On the arrival of a stranger, the host's etiquette is variable depending on the social status of the visitors. If the guest is a common

person, bread is baked and served up with *ayesh*; if the guest is a person of some small consequence, coffee is prepared for him, and also a dish called *behatta* (rice or flour boiled with sweet camel's milk), or that called *ftetat* (baked paste, kneaded up thoroughly with butter); but for a man of some rank, a kid or lamb is killed.

**Linking structure**: By the function of a synthetic phrase in the opening phrase of each episode, an episode is closely bound with the preceding event. It indicates that there is a structural inter-dependence between two episodes. Readers are expected to consider each new episode in the light of what has gone before. For, each preceding incident is the natural cause of that which follows.

**Miraculous (or Divine) Birth:** It refers to the birth of a child by God's intervention. In the narratives of barren matriarchs, they all had made at one stage or other a futile human effort to fulfill the promise of the Lord. But the conception of a child fulfillment of the promise of the Lord was not done by any futile human efforts, but by God's merciful and miraculous intervention.

**Prophetic seeing**: In the book of Genesis (Gn 18:2; 31:10, 12) as in the prophetic books, the pair of verb "looks up and saw" is used. It depicts the process of prophetic keen "observation and cognition" on the divine appearance (Jr 13:20; Zch 1:18; 2:1; 5:5; Ezk 1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9). Abraham's looking at the three sudden visitors is understood as an attentive prophetic seeing and perceiving.

**Sandwiched structure**: Generally child birth episodes in OT are plotted by both heading part (annunciation) and closing part (birth of a promised child). However, in the Abraham narrative, two perilous events are sandwiched (inserted) in between the heading part and the closing part. By God's unilateral intervention

covenant partners are delivered from the perilous situation and He fulfills his promise.

**Underlying motif:** The Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15) is written in typical Hebrew narrative style: This episode, especially about the identity of the visitors, is paratactic. Depictions about the moment of recognition of the deity and the motive of God's visit are typified by economy of detail. Those matters seem to remain in obscurity (or underlying) without narrated plainly. However, there are significant terms and sophisticated literary skills of the narrator that indicate some significant underlying information of those issues. They may become evident only on close inspection over the episodes applying the narrator's unique skill to come across his theological intent to readers.

**Well-wishing purpose of God's visit**: Purpose of God's visit is diverse: (1) to do judgment, (2) to test, (3) to make a covenant, (4) to share a fellowship, and (5) to fulfill His promise. Case (3), (4), and (5) may be understood as well-wishing purpose of God's visit. In this work, the purpose of the Lord's visit is discussed attentively.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

The episode in Genesis 18:1-15 is of exceptional significance. Here the Lord appeared as three men, which is a unique event in the Old Testament (cf. Von Rad 1972:205). The text of Genesis 18:1-15 is known as the first section of a larger narrative complex that covers Genesis 18 and 19 (cf. Driver 1904:191; Westermann 1985:274; Wenham 1994:40-43; Hamilton 1995:30). As this work did research on the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the Hebron narrative (Gn 18:1-33), this writer found that the interpretations of scholars on the passage are diverse and fragmentary. The logical flow in the systematic understanding of the narrative is mostly disconnected and confused. In other words, there are many conflicting views in interpreting each significant element of the narrative. Therefore, this writer feels a strong need to do research on these controversial issues within the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the Hebron narrative.

The next section will deal with the elements addressed in my research. These elements are all interrelated in the first section of the Hebron narrative.

## 1.2 Seven Antitheses

Fragmentary and inconsistent interpretations of the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the Hebron narrative need to be evaluated and interpreted again in the light of connecting themes in the former part (Gn 17) and following part (Gn 18:16-9:33; cf. Sarna 1989:128; Mathews 1996:195; Sailhamer 1976:143; Hartley 1995:175). It means that this writer do find that there are many neglected or un-properly interpreted elements

among the former interpretations on the episode (Gn 18:1-15). This writer finds that each different view or fragmented view is based on different clue words or interpretative perspectives borrowed from outside the Old Testament (cf. Gunkel 1997:192-193; Skinner 1980:302-303; Simpson 1978:616-617). This work presumes that the first narrative section (Gn 18:1-15) was written or compiled with one or another theological intent by the author. Therefore, this work assert that this narrative must be interpreted in line with the author's own theological intent as expressed through the author's unique literary skills (cf. Sailhamer 1976:142). Therefore, this work will attempt to find the author's own interpretative perspective in this thesis. Each existing controversial interpretative issue needs to be re-interpreted according to the author's own theological intent. There are various conflicting views in the understanding of the first section of the Hebron narrative. This work summarizes them into the following seven antitheses.

### 1.2.1 Abraham's Hospitality: Doing Meritorious Work or Worshiping the Lord?

The first issue is how to interpret Abraham's hospitality. The main concern is to decide whether Abraham's act of hospitality towards the three men is an act of charity aimed at earning some reward or merely an act of worship. From the era of the early church down to recent days, most scholars (cf. Ambrose, Augustine; Oden 2002:62-64; Calvin 1992:468; Hamilton 1995:9; Simpson 1978:616-617; Ross 1988:338; Wenham 1994:45) praise Abraham's hospitality as the proof that he showed charity to earn some reward. Many of them interpret Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors according to the interpretative perspective of Hebrews 13: 2 in the New Testament (cf. Hamilton 1995:9; Oden 2002:64; Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:192; Jarick 2000:86). According to such interpretation, scholars assume that Abraham could not immediately

recognize the deity of the visitors. Therefore, Abraham's exceedingly great hospitality is interpreted as the exemplary manner of saints that is worthy to be rewarded. So the birth of Isaac is interpreted as a reward (cf. Oden 2002:64; Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:192; Jarick 2000:86).

However, this simple retributive interpretation is clearly in conflict with the other main elements of the narrative. In the dialogue of Genesis 18:9-15, Abraham receives a word of reconfirmation about the promised son as he had received repeatedly before, showing God's covenantal faithfulness (Gn 12:2-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:4-5; 17:1-21). The retributive interpretation focusing only on the act of hospitality breaks the thematic flow of the whole Abraham narrative. Hospitable treatment of visitors is a general practice among nomadic tribes, and it is even today still taken for granted (cf. Westermann 1985:276). The word of Hebrews 13:2, which is spoken for the purpose of exhortation to practice hospitality for the church members who are in need, has been used as key to interpret the Hebron narrative. A meritorious view on Abraham's hospitality, however, is questionable. For, scholars' attention seems to be focused on a lesser important aspect out of many significant theological themes found in the narrative only by using an un-proper interpretative key word. Therefore, re-evaluation on the use of Hebrews 13:2 needs to be done in this thesis. Practical understanding of the Near Eastern cultures' custom to welcome visitors also needs to be considered. This writer feels a strong need to find out the author's own interpretative perspective as expressed in the text itself in Genesis 18:1-15 as well as in the larger context of the narrative. This is one of the most obvious research gaps addressed in this thesis.

### 1.2.2 Abraham's Recognition of the Deity: The First Moment or Later Moment?

The second issue is to decide exactly when Abraham first recognized the divinity of his visitors. Those scholars who praise Abraham's act of hospitality as a meritorious work presume that the Lord disguised his identity so that Abraham was not able to recognize his divinity from the beginning. They assert that God only begins to reveal himself in verse 9 or 10: "Where is your wife Sarah?" or "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son" (cf. Calvin 1992:472; Simpson 1978:619; Speiser 1964:130; Skinner 1980:301). Thus, the way of understanding Abraham's hospitality is closely related to the moment of his recognition of the divinity of the three men. Some Early Church Fathers (Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ephrem the Syrian and Caesarius of Arles; Oden 2002:61-64; Keil 1996:146) rather praise Abraham's pure heart and his discerning insight as a prophet, which enabled him to recognize the deity of the three men from the first moment that Abraham encountered them (Gn 18:2). Practically, for nomadic tribes discerning a stranger's purpose for his visit is a matter of life and death (cf. Gn 32:6-7; 34:25-29; Ex 17: 8-15). Abraham had been very vigilant for himself and for his group's safety whenever he encountered new groups of peoples. He even was afraid of being killed by other peoples (cf. Gen 12: 10-20, 20:1-18).

Therefore, this work assumes that Abraham had to welcome his visitors after his watchful and attentive discerning act. Consequently, Abraham's hospitable manner may be interpreted as an act of worship rather than one doing charity. The author introduces Abraham as a prophet through the quotation of the Lord's saying (Gn 18:17). Abraham had been depicted as a privileged prophet since he has been called by the Lord (Gn 12:1; 15:1; 20:7; cf. Calvin 1992:478; Von Rad 1972:183). The interpretative

perspective of Abraham narrative is closely related with the moment of recognition of the deity of the three men. Most important task for this thesis is to clarify whether Abraham recognized the deity from the first encounter with his visitors or only in the course of the conversation (cf. Gunkel 1997:198). Therefore, the view of Abraham's later recognition of deity needs to be re-evaluated through an extensive exegetical endeavor. Research about the moment of Abraham's recognition of the deity of the three men is therefore another research gap to be filled in this thesis.

### 1.2.3 Motive of God's Visit: To Test Abraham or Sharing Covenantal Fellowship?

The third issue to be addressed is the motive of the Lord's visit in human form. The main concern here is to decide whether the Lord visits Abraham to test the righteousness of his behavior (being hospitable towards unknown visitors) or rather to share covenantal fellowship with Abraham. Scholars who hold the view of Abraham's later recognition of the divinity of the three visitors commonly interpret that the motive for the disguised appearance of the Lord is to test Abraham's hospitality. Many of them conduct inter-textual study with pagan parallels (cf. Gunkel 1997:193). In the Greek mythology, the motif of deities' visit is usually to test the hospitality of a host. So gods disguise themselves therefore in plain human form. Hospitality is the only real virtue to be tested among pagan parallels (cf. Von Rad 1972:205; Roop 1987:126). So they attempt to interpret the motive of the Lord's visit as the testing of Abraham's hospitality in the fashion of Greek legends (cf. Gunkel 1997:193; Simpson 1978:616-617; Skinner 1980:299).

Generally in the Old Testament the anthropomorphic appearance of a divine being is indicated by the expression of a single angel (cf. Jos 5:13; Jdg 6:11; 13:3; 2 Sm

24:16; Bush 1981:282-283). But in the episode of Genesis 18 the Lord appeared in the form of three men (cf. Von Rad 1972:205). Therefore, some attempted to interpret the narrative by means of a retribution theology assuming that they are dealing here with a reminiscent of pagan polytheism (cf. Gunkel 1997:193-194; Skinner 1980:299; Simpson 1978:616; Wenham 1994:45). The incognito visitors give a majestic reward after the hospitality of their host is proved (cf. Skinner 1980:302-303; Von Rad 1972:205; Wenham 1994:45). But this simple retribution theology that emphasizes only the meritorious works of Abraham collides with the main themes of the whole Abraham narrative: God unilaterally showing his grace in election, giving promises, and showing faithfulness to fulfill his promise towards his covenant partners (cf. Hasel 1998:77, 92; Westermann 1985:276; Tenney 1977; Keiser 1979:89; Mathews 1996:122).

On the other hand, scholars who uphold the view of Abraham's immediate recognition assert that the motive of the Lord's visit is not to test Abraham's hospitality but to share covenantal fellowship with God's covenant partners (cf. Hamilton 1995:17; Sailhamer 1976:144; Ross 1988:343). Thus, the motive of eating is related closely to the purpose of God's visit (cf. Ross 1988:342-343; Keil 1996:146; Greidanus 1999:79).

The motif of God's visit in human form is closely related to different perspectives in the main part of the narrative. Therefore, it is important to sort out these conflicting views on the motive for the visit by thorough textual analysis. Investigating both the intent of the eating and the motive of God's visit are research gaps in this thesis. This work presumes that the Lord visited Abraham for having the covenantal fellowship (Gn 18:1). Naming the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the Hebron narrative needs to be relevant to the motif of God's visit. Therefore, from now on, this writer will name the first section (Gn 18:1-15) "the Fellowship Narrative" for the sake of convenient

discussions on my research works.

### 1.2.4 Concept of Food: Is it Ordinary Food or Cultic Offering?

The main concern here is to find out the underlying motive for preparing a huge meal. Scholars who hold the opinion that the visit of God indicates a test motive understand Abraham's preparing of a generous meal as the presentation of welcoming food (`~x,l lehem`/ daily bread) for ordinary human beings (cf. Dillmann 1897:92-93; Gunkel 1997:195; Skinner 1980:300; Hamilton 1995:8; Wenham 1994:46). But this work finds that many evidences that the food prepared for the visitors rather connotes offering `hx'n>mi` (*minha/* cultic food) for divine beings. The indication of an unusually large amount of flour may imply the liberality of the hospitable host towards the highest one or the being offerings to the deity (cf. Jamison et al 1997:155; Simpson 1978:618; Jdg 6:18-19). Because Abraham's presenting of a huge amount of food (three *seah,* around 39 liters) does not seem to be fit for just ordinary visitors.

Hamilton (1995:11) asserts that the motive for Abraham providing a calf is to show both Abraham's prosperity as well as his social status. But we also need to pay our attention to the guests' social status according to the cultural perspective of the ancient Near East (cf. Bush 1981:286-287). According to the ancient Near Eastern customs, a choice calf is to treat highly honored guests rather than just ordinary fellow beings (cf. Jamieson et al 1990:28; Hartley 1995:178). Therefore, doing further research is needed for finding a proper connotation for the food in relation to Abraham's motive of preparing such costly food.

### 1.2.5 The Birth of Isaac: Gift or Reward?

The fifth issue is the main theme of the dialogue in Genesis 18:9-15. The main concern is to decide whether Sarah receives the word of annunciation as the reward for Abraham's showing extraordinary hospitality or because of God's faithfulness to fulfill what he promised. Scholars who praise Abraham's hospitality as a charitable act tend to think that Abraham receives the word of reconfirmation as a reward for his acts (cf. Gunkel 1997:196; Wenham 1994:45). But Pagan kings blame Abraham's immorality harshly for telling lies (Gn 12:11-20; 20:1-18). When it comes to the moral maturity of Sarah, she seems to fall short of the standard of being blameless (Gn 16:1-6; 21:8-21; cf. Jeansonne 1990:18-21). However, apparently Sarah was described as a receiver of the benefit of the promise of the Lord.

Can showing of extraordinary hospitality towards the visitors just once cover all his and Sarah's moral shortcomings? This writer doesn't think it is the proper interpretation. Therefore, this writer asserts that the view of getting a reward for hospitality is not relevant to what the narrative tells the readers. There is a great difference whether the promise of the child is a *gift* from the Lord or whether it is a *reward* for doing righteousness (cf. Westermann 1985:276). Thus, the issue is controversial. The research gap to be addressed here is to clarify the author's theological view on this issue exegetically.

### 1.2.6 The Great Delay of the Fulfillment: Is It because of Sarah's Moral Unrighteousness or of her lacking of Faith?

The sixth issue to be considered is the reason for the great delay in the birth of the promised son. The main issue here is to find the most probable reason for the great

delay in the fulfillment of the promised son. What could be the reasons for this great delay in the fulfillment of the promised son? Was it because of the moral immaturity of Sarah? She was jealousy, harsh treating, hot-tempered, and un-merciful in dealing with the family problems in her relationship to Hagar (Gn 16:1-6; 21:8-21; cf. Jeansonne 1990:18-21). Nevertheless, the Lord grants Sarah to give birth to the promised son.

Was it because of a pagan idol worship background hailing from Sarah's hometown (cf. Simpson 1978:568-569; Sarna 1989:87; Wenham 1987:273)? Was Abraham's consanguineous marriage the reason for her barrenness and this great delay (cf. Gn 20:12; Lv 20:20-21; Sarna 1989:143; Wenham 1994:74)? For, certain forms of endogamy was condemned and forbidden as something abhorrent in the Pentateuch (Lv 18:9, 11 20:17; Dt 27:22; Ezk 22:11; cf. Sarna 1989:143; Von Rad 1972:227; Mathews 1996:257).

Sarah's unbelief could be a major reason for the great delay. Since the Lord rebuked Sarah for not believing in the promise of the Lord (Gn 18:13-15). To understand the reason for the great delay of the fulfillment is controversial. Sarah is the first barren matriarch in the Bible. Barrenness of women is a well-known themes in the Old Testament (Jdg 13:2-3; I Sm 1:2-8; Ps 127; 128; Is 54:1;cf. Lk 1:5-25; cf. Wenham 1987:273). The theological view on the barrenness of Sarah seems to be related to the view on other barren matriarchs after her. Therefore, inter-textual research on barren women needs to obtain a common view about the reason for such great delay (Gn 25:19-26; 30:1-24; Sm 1:1-20). Further investigation to find the most probable reason is another research gap to be addressed in this thesis.

### 1.2.7 Does the Lord require Righteousness by Faith or That of Obeying the Way of the Lord in the Hebron Narrative?

Many scholars view Abraham's demonstration of hospitality to strangers (Gn 18:1-15) as a feature of doing righteousness that earns rewards in the form of receiving the promised son (cf. Jarick 2000:86; Gunkel 1997:196; Dilmann 1897:93; Skinner 1980: 298; Wenham 1994:45; Oden 2002:64). In the larger context of "the Fellowship Narrative" (Gn 18:1-15) there are some elements that emphasize obeying the demand of the Lord in relation to the fulfillment of his promise, which may be understood as doing righteousness required by the Lord as the precondition of the fulfillment of God's promise (Gn 17:1-27; 18:17-19; 22:1-19). However, in the episode of Genesis 15:1-6, Abraham was depicted as the one who was credited as the righteous one by faith.

The two contrasting concepts of righteousness seem to affect readers when they interpret the narrative of Genesis 18:1-15. Those conflicting elements in the larger context of the narrative (Gn 17:1-27; 18:17-19; 22:1-19) create tensions for understanding the first section of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15). The main concern here is to first find the author's theological intent as it is presented throughout the whole Abraham narrative (Gn 11:27-25:10). Secondly this writer must try to understand the relationship of these conflicting elements to interpret the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) properly thereby addressing another research gap.

## 1.3 Methodology of thesis

Scholars tried to find the significance of the original meaning of the text by using different historical approaches. The endeavor to locate the patriarchs within a specific historical context has been long and complicated (cf. LaSor et al 1996:40). The

diverse views on the historical origin of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) confused readers in their understanding of this narrative (cf. Hermann 1960:208-209; Gunkel 1997:196; Simpson 1978:507,618; Westermann 1985:275-279; Von Rad 1972:205; Skinner 1980:300; Hamori 2004:9; Korpel 1990:91; Xella 1978:483-488). Historical questions from both grammatical-historical approach and the historical-critical methods (source, form, and redaction criticisms) seemed to have ignored the author's (or narrator's) own interpretation of the patriarchal events (cf. Dockery et al 1999:209).

As readers neglected the narrator's theological guidance, they seemed to have produced several fragmentary and inconsistent interpretations of the Hebron Narrative. This writer finds that each of these fragmented views is based on different interpretative perspectives borrowed from outside the Old Testament, ignoring narrator's own directions (cf. Gunkel 1997:192-193; Skinner 1980:302-303; Simpson 1978:616-617). In response to these, many scholars attempted reading the Bible in a holistic or synchronic way, solely concentrating on the existing form of the text (cf. Dockery et al 1999:206). The main reason this writer chooses the method of narrative criticism is that it asserts that authorial intent can be discovered by a careful analysis of the author's product, the text itself, writtten by his unique literary skills (cf. Dockery et al 1999:209; Hamori 2004:52; Sailhamer 1976:142).

Narrative critics are not interested in discerning the historical reliability, scientific proof, or source strata that lie behind the text. They are rather interested in determining the effect that the final text has on the reader in its present form (cf. Knight 2004:170). Thus, this method is concerned with the effect that the text has as it now stands on readers (cf. Knignt 2004:169-170; Dockery et al 1999:209).

The neglect of history could be the most damaging feature the narrative approach has (cf. Dockery at al 1999:226). Narrative critism, however, respects the narrator's divine authority, as the theological insight the author projects into the significance of the events he narrates (cf. Chisholm 2006:72). I stand on the view that the Old Testament narratives do not simply inform the reader of what happened, but they also have a literary dimension that contributes to its overall theological purpose (cf. Chisholm 2006:26). These aspects of narrative criticism encourage this writer to attempt reading the Fellowship Narrative to investigate the narrator's theological insight found in the text.

In the Bible original independent units are combined with each other to form larger narrative units, creating a new larger narrative theme (cf. Venter 2005:5-6; Sarna 1989:128; Mathews 1996:195; Sailhamer 1976:143; Hartley 1995:175). The research purpose of this writer is to find the author's own theological intent in the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) in relationship to the author's perspective embedded in the whole Abraham narrative (Gn 11:27-25:10), functioning as the larger context of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15). This wrirter assumes that the Fellowship Narrative was written by a final editor (narrator) in relationship with the thematic flow of the macro context of the whole Abraham narrative.

All of the research work will be done based on the study method of narrative criticism. This approach is basically synchronic and favors the final form of the text as it is found in the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Literary parallelism at the level of the macroplot in the Old Testament narratives shows the narrative typology. Earlier characters supply the pattern for later character in the story (cf. Chisholm 2006:81). Therefore, I wish to attempt to use inter-textual study method limitting to the parallels

within the Old Testament itself.

This writer has indeed found that inter-textual study of pagan parallels outside the Old Testament have contributed in supplying many new insights for biblical interpretation. However, to find the author's own theological intent within the given text, inter-textual study on the parallels within the Old Testament should preferably be restricted to the Old Testament itself.

This writer expects that this research may help readers to find the author's (or final compiler's) own theological view of the Fellowship narrative in a holistic way, being not fragmented (Gn 18:1-15).

# CHAPTER TWO: THE PROPER INTERPRETATIVE PERSPECTIVE FOR THE FELLOWSHIP NARRATIVE (GN 18:1-15)

Generally scholars who find theological significance in Abraham's hospitality uphold Abraham's gradual or later recognition of the deity (cf. Ambrose, Augustine; Oden 2002:62-64; Calvin 1992:468; Hamilton 1995:9; Simpson 1978:616-617; Ross 1988:338; Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:193; Wenham 1994:45; Brueggemann 1997:166; Hartley 2000:177; Exell 1900:5; Hirsch 1989:313). They commonly interpret that the purpose of the Lord's visit in human form is to test Abraham's hospitality. Therefore, they assert that Abraham could not recognize the deity at the initial moment of their encounter (cf. Gunkel 1997:193). They praise Abraham's hospitable manner as showing his righteousness and interpret Abraham's receiving the promised son as the reward for his hospitality (cf. Wenham 1994:45).

But according to the previous episode, Isaac's birth was destined already within a time limit (Gn 17:19, 21). Their retributive theology was considered too much in interpreting the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15).These interpretations conflict with the narrator's own theological views: (1) righteousness by faith (Gn 15:6), (2) God's mercifulness to save Lot (Gn 19:29), and (3) God's being gracious to make Sarah conceive (Gn 21:1).

There are a few scholars who uphold the position of initial recognition of the divinity of the visitors interpreting the purpose of God's visit is to share covenantal fellowship with Abraham and his household (cf. Ross 1988:343; Sailhamer 1990). And they understand that receiving Isaac comes from the Lord's covenantal faithfulness that keeps His promise rejecting the traditional view of getting reward (Gn 17:17; 18:13, 15; cf. Sailhamer 1990:148; Ross 1988:345-346). Different interpretative perspectives

affect the way of understanding this narrative quite differently. Therefore, this study attempts to find proper interpretative perspectives that will explain the Fellowship Narrative logically without causing interpretative conflicts with the narrator's central theme of his theology. This study expects to find the author's own interpretative perspective as expressed by the narrative itself through the study method of narrative criticism (cf. Westermann 1985:274; Simpson 1978:137; Knoght 2004:169).

This study assumes that the view of Abraham's immediate recognition of the deity from the first moment is the author's own interpretative perspective presented in the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15). Consequently this study will try to attest that God's well-wishing purpose of visit is the narrator's view rejecting test motive view of traditional scholars. Therefore, the author's narrative skills used within the larger context of the narrative (Gn 11:27-25:11) need to be researched as well for finding his common literary skills. This study expects that the common literary skills might help to analyze the episode properly (Gn 18:1-15).

**2.1 Genre of Genesis 18:1-15**

Many recent scholars share the opinion that the Abraham text was written in narrative style (cf. Chisholm 2006:26; Roop 1987:93-161; Gunkel 1997:192-219; Sailhamer 1976:108-181; Hartley 1995:130-232; Mathews 1996:104-328). Categorically the text of Genesis 18:1-15 belongs to the Patriarchal narratives presenting Abraham's family saga in a story-like fashion (cf. Gunkel 1994:13; Chisholm 2005:25; Coats 1983:102). It has a literary dimension as a narrative consisting of three basic elements of narrative materials: space, time, character, and a fourth element plot (cf. Knight 2004:171; Venter 2005:5; Chisholm 2006:26; Block 1999:601). This episode

applies the literary genre of comic plot, for it shows the tint of a happy-ending story (Gn 18:10, 14; cf. Gn 17:21; Chisholm 2006:34-35; Sarna 1989:128, 130; Hartley 1995:178). The physical condition of the protagonists became too old to raise any children so that when the Lord gives them the word of annunciation, they laugh skeptically (Gn 17:17; 18:12). However, by the divine intervention they will laugh at last out of joy (Gn 21:1-7; cf. Mathews 1996:216; Chisholm 2006:35).

Thus the story deals with the coming birth of a child as an element consisting of a half part of the episode, therefore, it can be titled (Gn 18:1-15) "Annunciation narrative" (cf. Coats 1983:137; Wenham 1994:40). However, within the whole Abraham narrative, the annunciation about the offspring has been repeated many times (Gn 13:16; 15:5; 17:19). The title "Annunciation narrative" does not seem to express the uniqueness of the episode.

The narrative (Gn 18:1-15) is of exceptional significance. Since the Lord appears as three men, which is a unique event in the Old Testament (cf. Von Rad 1972:205). Heavenly visitors eat meals like human being, which is unique act of the divine beings (Gn 18:1-8), and they pay a direct attention to Sarah for the first time in her life in this episode (Gn 18:9-15). In this unique way, the narrator tells the story in a dramatic fashion that highlights God's special relationship with his beloved covenant partners (cf. Chisholm 2006:26; Hamilton 1995:17; Sailhamer 1976:144; Ross 1988:343).

Therefore, the title of this episode needs to be called "the Fellowship Narrative." The story telling about these significant elements is much more of a symbolic than an objective representation of event (Coats 1983:102). Therefore, this narrative draws a special attention of readers in understanding the significance of the Lord's eating and

His special care for an old woman's unusual conception.

## 2.2 Narrative Style

According to traditional source criticism, the passage of Genesis 18:1-15 is identified as a naïve anthropomorphic theophany narrative by the J editor, who uses the picturesque, lucid, and flexible style of description to form a major component in the Abraham-Lot legend cycle (cf. Dillmann 1897:91; Driver 1904:191; Skinner 1980:298; Gunkel 1997:192). The progression of events in the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15) is written in typical Hebrew narrative style: The narrative style of this episode, especially about the identity of the visitors, is paratactic, and it is typified by economy of detail about the moment of recognition of the deity so that it seems to remain in obscurity or ambiguity (cf. Hamilton 1995:7; Heard 2001:4-5). The feelings and thoughts of Abraham are not so much externalized (Gen 18:9-15). The description about the motive of God's appearance in human form seems to be lacking, and the purpose of His visit seems to be remained unexpressed (cf. Lundbom 1998:136-138). Readers, however, may find the author's sophisticated skill to present the narrative as a tightly structured one rather than loose and un-skillful collections of Patriarchal cycles (cf. Wikipedia: 2009). Therefore, the underlying theological motif needs to be searched for by means of analyzing the interaction between narrative materials and underlying plot structure (cf. Heard 2001: 5; Venter 2005:3-4).

## 2.3 Structural Analysis and its Interpretation

The structure of the first section itself (Gn 18:1-15) seems to be very simple and clear (cf. Mathews 1999:215). It consists of the chapter heading (Gn 18:1a) followed by

two equal size of scenes: Abraham welcomes the three visitors with a cordial manner (1st scene; Gn 18:1b-8) and Abraham receives a word of encouraging reconfirmation for Sarah in dialogue form (2nd scene; Gn 18:9-15; Hartley 1995:177; Gunkel 1997:192). There is a fast movement of some significant actions and dialogues including narrative remarks in the course of the narrative (cf. Westermann 1985:274).

Generally the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) is known as the first section of the larger narrative complex of Genesis 18 and 19 (cf. Driver 1904:191; Von Rad 1972:204; Westermann 1985:274; Hartley 1995:177; Wenham 1994:40-43; Hamilton 1995:30). Traditional interpretations considered the structural relationship of the fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15) with the following the Sodom episode (Gn 18:16-9:38). That is why the narrative (Gn 18:1-15) used to be called "*the first section*" of the larger narrative complex of Genesis 18 and 19.

A recent scholar Mathews (1996:209) attempted to analyze the narrative by the perspective of the progeny theme, and he divided the narrative complex (Gn 18-19) into the sub-section finding a chiasmus as follows:

A 18:1-15 Visitors' announcement of Isaac's birth

B 18:16-19:29 Annunciation and Destruction of Sodom

A' 19:30-38 Birth of Lot's sons Moab and Ben-Ammi

Even though he used the study method of narrative criticism, he also considered the structural connection with the following Sodom narrative one-sidedly like traditional scholars. However, if one reads the first section in the Hebrew Scripture, he may find that the structure of the first section (Gn 18:1-15) is closely linked with the

preceding episode (Gn 17:23-27) by a syntactical function of the opening phrase, (hw"ëhy> 'wyl'ae ar'ÛYEw:) "the Lord appeared to him" (LXE, KJV; Gn 18:1a). Syntactically the antecedent of "him" is Abraham as referred to in Genesis 17:26 (cf. Sailhamer 1976:142).

NIV and NIB translation of it might mislead readers to understand the linking structure, for they translate it into "the Lord appeared to Abraham" instead of "the Lord appeared to him." The translation of NIV and NIB makes the eyes of readers blinded not to see the significant linking structure. This linking structure seems to indicate readers to understand the episode of the first section in light of the preceding event (cf. Von Rad 1972:204; Venter 2005:5; Sailhamer 1976:142). This study tries to keep balance in considering the structural relationship between the preceding episode and the following one. A new attempt to seek for a new interpretative perspective from the linking structure, which had been neglected, is necessary (see ch. 2.1.6).

If one considered that this episode (Gn 18:1-15) belongs to one of the annunciation narratives (cf. 2 Ki 4:8-17; 1 Sm 1:1-20; Hasel 1998:181-182; Wenham 1987:273; Hamilton 1976:72-74; Mathews 1996:265-267), he may find that it is incomplete in the form defined by these patterns (cf. Coats 1983:138). For, there is no fulfillment part that reports giving birth to a child in the narrative. Readers find it in the passage of Genesis 21:1-7 after the several inserted episodes (Gn 18:16-20:18). Therefore, this study attempts to consider another extended larger structural context (Gn18:1-21:7). This study assumes that the narrator tried to come across some messages from this unusual macro structural context. This work named it "sandwiched structure." (see ch.2.1.5)

### 2.3.1 Problem by the Traditional Structural Interpretation

Traditionally the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the Hebron narrative has been interpreted in tandem with the Sodom narrative (Gn 19:1-38; cf. Oden 2002:63; Calvin 1965:495-496; Driver 1904:198; Von Rad 1972:217-218; Westermann 1985:274, 302; Hamilton 1995:33; Mathews 1996:213). Thematically the episode of the first section (Gn 18:1-15) is contrasted with the tragic development of the Sodom story (Gn 19:1-38; cf. Mathews 1996:208; Chisholm 2006:34). Scholars have been interested in comparing the different numbers of visitors, the spirituality of the hosts, the nuance of geographical and time setting, the response of the visitors to the invitation of the host, and the result of hospitality between these two sections (cf. Hartley 1995:177; Skinner 1980:306; Jukes 1993:230-231). The general tendency in the interpretation of this first episode (Gn 18:1-15) through this kind of contrast was to focus on the exemplary acts of Abraham's hospitality (cf. Mathews 1996:213).

Consequently readers used to pay attention only to the importance of meritorious works (ethical sense of righteousness) done by human beings for getting a reward of salvation (cf. Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:192 cf. Skinner 1980:302-303; Von Rad 1972:205). Readers may find some better examples of behavior in Abraham's camp compared to Lot's dwelling city. However, such an interpretative perspective collides with the author's own theological view on righteousness and deliverance (Gn 15:6; 19:29; 21:1). The problem of such an interpretative perspective is to ignore God's faithfulness that tries to keep his promise for his covenant partners in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15; cf. Tenney 1977; Keiser 1979:89; Mathews 1996:122).

Recent scholars find that the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) functions as the first section of a *sandwiched structure* in the macro context (Gn 18:1-15-21:7) covering

from the promise part to the fulfillment part (cf. Ross 1988:340; Mathews 1996:246; Wenham 1994:75; Westermann 1985:274). By using this structure the author seems to indicate the Lord's special favor for his covenant partners in keeping what he promised.

### 2.3.2 Sandwiched Structure in the Larger Context (Gn 18:1 – 21:7)

According to the common structural pattern found in barren matriarchs' narratives in the Old Testament (Gn 25:19-26; 30:1-24; Jdg 13; Sm 1:1-20; 2 Ki 4:8-17), the fulfillment part (birth of the promised child) is always included (cf. Hasel 1998:181-182; Wenham 1987:273; Hamilton 1976:72-74; Mathews 1996:265-267). But in the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), the final fulfillment comes only in Genesis 21:1-7. The episodes of the Sodom tragedy (Gn 18:16-19: 38) and the perilous abduction by king Abimelech (Gn 20:1-18) are inserted between the promise of Isaac's birth (Gn 18:9-15) and the fulfillment part (Gn 21:1-7; cf. Ross 1988:340; Mathews 1996:246; Wenham 1994:75; Westermann 1985:274). In other words, structurally two perilous events (Gn 18:16-20: 18) are sandwiched in between the heading part (Gn 18:1-15) and the closing part (Gn 21:1-7). The macro structure seems to show that it is not the loose collections of tales but a tightly structured one (cf. Wikipedia: 2009).

Since this kind of literary skill can also be seen in the construction used in Abram's early harsh experience (Gn 12:1-13:2) known as the first abduction of Sarai by Pharaoh (Gn 12:10-20; cf. Westermann 1985:161, 318; Wenham 1994:68; Mathews 1996:246-247; Hartley 1995:140). As soon as Abram received the divine blessings, he had to face the harsh and hostile reality of the present (Gn 12:1-13:1; cf. Sarna 1989:93, 97). The event of Abram's sojourn into Egypt as an interlude (sandwiched part) is set between the promises of blessing (Gn 12:1-3, 7) and the acquisition of riches by the

intervention of the Lord (Gn 12:17-13:2; cf. Mathews 1996:122). Abraham's early and later life stories may be compared as follows:

Abram's Early Harsh Experience (Gn 12:1-13:2)

1. The heading part (Abram received blessed promises; Gn12:1-7),
2. Sandwiched part (harsh experience of famine and the abduction of Sarai by Egyptian king; Gn 12:8-16),
3. The fulfillment part (God's intervention to deliver Sarai and Abram became very rich at last (Gn 12:17-13:2).

Abraham's Late Harsh Experience (Gn 18:9-21:7)

1. The Heading part (Abraham received reconfirmation of the promise; Gn 18:9-15)
2. Sandwiched part (harsh experiences of Sodom disaster (Gn 18:16-19:38), Moving down to Gerar, and the abduction of Sarah by Abimelech king of Gerar (Gn 20:2).
3. The fulfillment part (God's intervention to deliver Sarah (Gn 20:3-18) and Abraham became a father of Isaac at last (Gn 21:1-7)

Isaac also goes down to Gerar because of famine and experiences the very similar harsh experiences as his father Abraham had (cf. Isaac: Gn 26:1-33; cf. Sarna 1989:93; Hartley 1995:140). Therefore, the author's theological intent should be read in terms of this sandwiched macro-plot (larger structure) of the Abraham narrative (Gn 18:1-21:7).

#### 2.3.2.1 The Author's Theological Intent by Using a Sandwiched Plot Structure

The main theological theme found in the sandwiched structure is that the chosen ones who received God's promise may fall in danger and face threats of failing God's promise, but the Lord intervenes in the situations and fulfills His promise magnificently (cf. Sailhamer 1976:116). Even though God's chosen ones show human deficiency or weakness, Yahweh still rescues them and fulfills his promises (cf. Gn 12:1-13:2; Von Rad 1972:169; Sarna 1989:93; Hartley 1995:137; Westermann 1985:168; Tenney 1977; Keiser 1979:89; Mathews 1996:122). The plot structure and the theme of Abram's going down to Egypt (Gn 12:10-13:2) becomes a prolepsis (or foreshadowing and typology) for the later Israelites' historical event of Exodus (Gn 41:54b-Ex 12:4; cf. Wenham 1984:291; Sailhamer 1976:117; Hamilton 1976:380, 386; Mathews 1996:123).

At the same time, the author seems to remind the chosen ones (readers) not to act irresponsibly and show immoral behavior. Pharaoh's repeated saying of `taZOà-hm;;` ("what is this") and `hm'Ûl'` ("what" or "how") questions connote a rebuking tone against Abram's wrong behavior (Gn 12:18-19; cf. Wenham 1984:290): "What is this you have done to me!"; "Why didn't you tell me?"; "Why did you say." The question is the formula of disappointment putting Abraham to shame and justifying pagan kings (cf. Westermann 1985:166; Wenham 1987:290-291). For, the "why" question is often used in expressing strong disappointment when some one does what should not be done (Gn 20:9; 29:25; 31:27, 30; Nm 23:11; cf. Lm 2:48; Westermann 1985:166). These rhetoric expressions also remind us of the garden episode where interrogation of the woman's wrong behavior is found (cf. Gn 3:13, "What is this you have done?"; cf. Mathews 1996:123).

The Egyptian king is seen as more saintly than Abram, but Abram is treated

favorably by both the Lord and Pharaoh in return (cf. Hamilton 1976:385). Abimelech also appears to be an exemplary character in Genesis 20:1-18; Abraham deceived Abimelech again, so he became an innocent victim and he denounced Abraham with the same "why" formula of rebuke (Gn 12:18; 20:9-16; cf. Hamilton 1976:71). But God's intervention appears showing partiality for Abraham compared to Abimelech (Gn 20:6-7). What is the theological significance of this event?

These sandwiched-plot-episodes (Gn 12:1-13:2; 18-21) emphasize God's special favor for his covenant partners even when they fall into dangerous situations (cf. Ross 1988:340; Mathews 1996:246; Westermann 1985:274). The Lord's showing partiality for Abraham is apparent even though he is accused of poor morality by pagan kings (cf. Roop 1987:103). In reverse this may demonstrate an important lesson about God's administration over fulfilling His plan of salvation. The Lord chose Abraham who was a weak person, not a perfect one, not as an ideal character such as is found in heroic tales (cf. Gn 11:27-32; Dt 7:7; 9:4-6; Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ec 7; 20; Hartley 1995:138; Wenham 1984:291). Therefore, the Lord shows his mercifulness and long patience in making a father of faith or new priest nation for the whole world (Gn 12:1-3; Dt 9:4-6). The story apparently shows that Abraham could not attain security by his own performance (meritorious good behavior): only God could save under such circumstances (cf. Dt 9:4-6; Wenham 1984:291). Such elements of the salvation story become the foundation of human hope for getting salvation apart from the meritorious works (cf. Dt. 9:4-6; Gl 3:5; Heb 2:14-18; Hamilton 1976:387).

Thus, it is essential to interpret the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) within the context of the macro-plot (sandwiched) structure (Gn 18-21). Therefore, the meritorious view on Abraham's hospitality earning a word of reconfirmation on the promised son

Isaac is not in line with the author's theological intent as shown by this sandwiched structure.

### 2.3.3 Summary: The Structural Interpretation on the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15)

Traditionally the blessed episode of the first section (Gn 18:1-15) is contrasted with the tragic development of the Sodom story (Gn 18:16-19:38). The general tendency on the episode (Gn 18:1-15) focused on the exemplary acts of Abraham's hospitality. Consequently readers used to pay attention only to the importance of meritorious works done by humans for getting a reward or salvation. Such an interpretation collides with the author's own theological view on righteousness and deliverance (Gn 15:6; 19:29; 21:1).

Generally traditional interpretations considered the structural relationship of the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15) with the following the Sodom episode (Gn 18:16-9:38). That is why the narrative (Gn 18:1-15) was called "*the first section*" of the larger narrative complex (Gn 18 and 19).

However, the structure of the first section (Gn 18:1-15) is closely linked with the preceding episode (Gn 17:23-27) by a syntactical function of the opening phrase, (hw"ëhy> 'wyl'ae ar'ÛYEw:) "the Lord appeared to him" (LXE, KJV; Gn 18:1a). Syntactically the antecedent of "him" is Abraham as referred to in Genesis 17:26. This linking structure indicates readers to understand the episode of the first section in light of the preceding event.

This annunciation narrative (Gn 18:1-15; cf. 2 Ki 4:8-17; 1 Sm 1:1-20) has no the fulfillment part giving birth to a child. It is located in Genesis 21:1-7. Structurally

two perilous events are inserted (Gn 18:16-20:18) between the heading part (Gn 18:1-15) and the closing part (Gn 21:1-7). We need to consider this extended larger structural context (namely "sandwiched structure"; Gn18:1-Gn 21:1). This kind of literary skill reflects Abraham's earlier harsh experience known as the first abduction of Sarai by Pharaoh (Gn 12:10-20). As soon as Abram received the divine blessings, he had to face the harsh and hostile reality of the present (Gn 12:1-13:1): Abduction of Sarai in Egypt (sandwiched part) is set between the promises of blessing (Gn 12:1-3, 7) and the acquisition of riches by the intervention of the Lord (Gn 12:17-13:2).

The main theological theme of the sandwiched structure is that the chosen ones who received God's promise may fall in danger and face threats of failing God's promise, but the Lord intervenes in these situations and fulfills His promise magnificently. Even though God's chosen ones show human deficiency or weakness, Yahweh still rescues them and fulfills his promises (cf. Gn 12:1-13:2; 41:54b-Ex 12:4). The story apparently shows that Abraham could not attain security by his own performance (meritorious good behavior): only God could save under such circumstances (cf. Dt 9:4-6). Therefore, the meritorious view on Abraham's hospitality earning a word of reconfirmation on the promised son Isaac is not in line with the author's theological intent as shown by this sandwiched structure.

### 2.4 Linking Structure between Genesis 18 with Genesis 17

Recent scholars pay close attention to the structural link of Genesis 18 with Genesis 17 (cf. Wenham 1994:41, 45; Sarna 1989:128; Mathews 1996:195; Sailhamer 1976:143; Hartley 1995:175). If the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) is interwoven with what have happened just a few days ago, as chronological records imply (Gn 17:17,

21, 24 and 18:10a; cf. 21:5), then, readers may possibly find the author's inter-related theological intension here (cf. Von Rad 1972:204; Venter 2005:5).

In other words, the episode of Genesis 18:1-15 is built upon the preceding episode (cf. Calvin 1965:468; Ross 1988:341; Sarna 1989:128; Wenham 1994:41). The order of events is important because readers are expected to consider each new episode in the light of what has gone before (cf. Knight 2004:171). For, each preceding incident is the natural cause of that which follows (cf. Gunkel 1994:50). The last usage of the name Abraham is found in the account of circumcision (Gn 17:23-27; cf. Sailhamer 1976:143). Abraham performed circumcision promptly and obediently "on the same (or very) day" (~AYæh; '~c,[,'.,B Gn 17:23 and 26), which is the very phrase repeated emphatically within the account of Genesis 17.

Such a repeated phrase emphasizes Abraham's revitalized faith and willing obedience (Gn 17:23a and 26; cf. Sailhamer 1976:142-143; Von Rad 1972:203; Mathews 1996:207; Hartley 1995:175). Thus, acting faithfully to execute circumcision implies the subject of the preceding event (cf. Gn 17:23-27; Sailhamer 1976:143; Ross 1988:341; Sarna 1989:128; Wenham 1994:41). Therefore, the opening line of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) must be understood as being closely linked to the preceding event (Gn 17:23-27) as the author indicates syntactically. In this way, the author praises Abraham's swift obedience. Therefore, the phrase "the Lord appeared to him," may be rephrased to read "the Lord appeared to Abraham who finished the circumcision promptly out of revitalized faith" (cf. Hartley 1995:175; Knight 2004:171). The motive of the Lord's visit must be understood as a well-wishing one.

Similar thematic elements found in both chapters (Gn 17 and 18) also support such linking (cf. Hamilton 1995:5; Sarna 1989:128). These elements are predictions of

the promised offspring (Gn 17:21; 18:10, 14), the incredulous laughter of the covenant partners (Gn 17:16-21; 18:12-15), and the descriptions of the advanced age of the covenant partners (Gn 17:17-18; 18:10-14; Mathews 1996:195). The chronological remarks on the ages of the main characters in both episodes (Gn 17:17, 21, 24 and 18:10a, 14; cf. 21:5) also provide another evidence of the same structural link: "Abraham was ninety-nine years old (Gn 17:24)," "About this time next year, (Gn 18:10a)," and "A hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him" (Gn 21:5). These chronological remarks usually indicate momentous occasions in the Pentateuch (Gn 7:13; Ex 12:17, 41, 51; Lv 23:21, 28-30; Dt 32:48; cf. Mathews 1996:207).

These common elements evidence a structural inter-dependence between Genesis 17 and 18 (cf. Mathews 1996:211; Sailhamer 1976:142). The author used the same inter-depending linking structure in Genesis 15.

### 2.4.1 Similar Linking Structure in Genesis 15:1

The opening phrase "After these things" in Genesis 15:1 also establishes a connection with the preceding events of chapter 14, which reports about Abram's victory over the four allied kings in the Mesopotamia region (the ancient land of Babylon and Persian Empire; cf. Sarna 1989:103; Hamilton 1976:400). Therefore, by this linking phrase readers may reflect on the events that happened in chapter 14, particularly what Abram did to Melchizedek and the king of Sodom (Gn 14; Sarna 1989:112; Mathews 1996:161; Westermann 1985:217; Wenham 1987:325, 327). Abram identified Melchizedek's God with the Lord he serves (cf. Mathews 1996:156). Abram confessed his complete trust in God and thankfulness by offering tithe to Melchizedek, but he disdainfully rejects any idea of profiting personally from the booty showing

generosity in dealing with the king of Sodom (cf. Hartley 1995:150-151; Wenham 1987:318; Mathews 1996:157; Roop 1987:109).

Then, the interpretive nuance of the opening phrase of chapter 15 must be closely bound with the preceding event (Gn 14:1-24) as the author indicates syntactically. The Lord is pleased with Abram's waging war to deliver the war captives and by returning plundered goods to war-torn people in chapter 14. Therefore, the motive of God's appearance to Abram in Genesis 15 may also be understood as a well-wishing one like that of the theophany in Genesis 18:1.

The linking structure between Genesis 14 and 15 is similar to that linking Genesis 17 and 18 (cf. Westermann 1985:217; Sailhamer 1976:142; Wenham 1987:321; Knight 2004:171; Gunkel 1994:50; Hartley 1995:175; Knight 2004:171). The episodes in the Abraham narrative are not isolated, but they are interwoven into a macro-plot (or a larger plot) that encompasses or transcends the individual stories (cf. Chisholm 2006:77). One may find the same structure from the report of Genesis 17:1a, "when Abram was ninety-nine years old," which serves as a connecting link to the preceding narrative of Ishmael's birth in Genesis 16:16, "Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar born him Ishmael" (cf. Sailhamer 1976:137). The author of the Abraham narrative is accustomed to using such linking plot as expression of his peculiar literary skill. Therefore, if one attempts to interpret the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15), he must consider such narrative skills of the author.

### 2.4.2 Theological Nuance of "the Lord appeared to" in the Larger Context

The author of the book of Genesis uses the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to," as distinct from divine speech introduced by `ar'ÛYEw:` (*va-yera*): three times with

Abraham (Gn 12:7; 17:1; 18:1), twice with Isaac (Gn 26:2, 24), once with Jacob "God appeared to" (Gn 35:1, 9; cf. Sarna 1989:91). The opening phrase is understood as to express the author's theological perspective (v 1; cf. Hamilton 1995:7; Westermann 1985:277; Shailhamer 1976:142). The author usually indicates to the reader in what terms he should read the narrative by means of the opening phrases (for narrative technique cf. Venter 2005:6; Hartley 1995:177). Repeated phrases are understood as to carry the specific themes of each narrative (cf. Sarna 1989:92; Westermann 1985:277; Mathews 1996:216). It is therefore of great importance to indicate what the phrase "the Lord appeared to" may connote.

Firstly the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" is used to indicate that the Lord visits covenant partners to give a hopeful promise of both land and descendants (Gn 12:7; 17:1-8; 26:2-4; 35:9-13; Cassuto 1964:85-87; Mathews 1996:192-193; Wenham 1984:14-15). The phrase "the Lord appeared to" signals the well-wishing purpose of God's visit.

Secondly there is no description about the covenant partners' terrified response to the theophany in the episodes narrated with the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" (cf. Bruegemann 1982:157). Commonly the one encountered in a theophany for the first time is afraid or terrified (cf. Gn 28:17; Ex 3:6; Jdg 6:22-23; 13:22). In the Fellowship Narrative (Gn18:1-15), Abraham is not terrified, for he already had experienced theophanic events many times. Chronicler describes Abraham as a friend of the Lord (2 Chr 20:7). Therefore, the opening phrase signals the Lord's showing intimacy with his beloved one (cf. Gn 35:9; Youngblood 1991:34-35; Mathews 1996:192-193).

Thirdly within the episodes initiated with the deity title of "the Lord" God

always appears to encourage his beloved servant by saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield” (Gn 15:1), “I will be with you” (Gn 26:3), “I am with you,” “I will not leave you” (Gn 28:15). These encouraging and comforting words match well with the meaning of Yahweh (“One who is present,” or “One who is”) that connotes “Active Being,” “Present One,” “Existing One” (cf. Ex 3:13-22; Durham 1987:39; Brown 1979). The Lord delivers his covenant partners who are in some kinds of crisis by granting his personal presence (Gn 17:1, 17-18; 26:1-3; 28:13-15; 35:1-9; cf. Ross 1988:341; Youngblood 1991:34-35; Keil 75-76; Wenham 1994:222). Then, the phrase “the Lord appeared to” signals His great comfort and encouragement toward his covenant partners.

Fourthly the opening phrase signals the more distinct and vivid revelation of the Lord. The Nifal form of the verb `har` (*ra-a*) is a technical term for divine self-disclosure meaning, “to reveal oneself,” “to be seen,” and “make oneself visible” (cf. Sarna 1989:92; Brown 1979; VanGermeren 1997:1007-1014; Harris et al 1980). Therefore, the theophanic verb `ar'ÛYEw` (“appeared”) in the opening phrase “the Lord appeared to” may be interpreted as *“he revealed himself visibly”;* cf. Sarna 1989:91; VanGemeren 1997:1007). This is one of the textual proofs of Abraham’s immediate recognition of the deity from the first moment depicted.

Gradually the Lord’s methods of communication with Abram seem to be shifted from the simple way (Gn 12:1-3; 13:14-17) to a more profound way by accompanying visions and deep sleep (Gn 15:1, 12; Ezk 1:1; Dn 7:1, 2; 8:1; 10:9; cf. Hamilton 1976:377, 418). The author seems to heighten (or augment) its dramatic force by this shift so that readers may notice that a divine intervention has occurred more vividly and *even visibly* in the Fellowship Narrative as “the Lord appeared to Abraham” when he obeyed faithfully to the Lord’s command for the first time (cf. Gn 12:7; Westermann

1985:155, 270; Hamilton 1976:377, 479; Mathews 1996:216, 207).

Fifthly in the following events started by the opening phrase, "the Lord appeared to," the Lord grants Abraham to participate in divine council through dialogue for the deliverance of other peoples (cf. Gn 18:16-33; cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Mathews 1996:222). These activities are understood as the fulfillment of Abraham's blessed role for all nations, which was promised to Abram when he was called by the Lord (cf. Gn 12:3; 18:19; Von Rad 1972:210).

One may conclude that Abraham is represented by this formula as someone who is greater than just ordinary prophets. Abraham, who is honored as God's friend, is a fitting prototype for the great prophets like Moses (cf. Gn 18:17; 2 Chr 20:7; Boice 1985:146-149; Mathews 1996:222). Thus, the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to him" signals all blessed things in the following content of each episode of the narrative. The phrase also reminds readers of Abraham's preceding faithful acts of obedience to the Lord's command (Gn 12:4-6; 17:23-27).

On the other hand, other anthropomorphic parallels show some contrasting nuances of the opening phrase of "the angel of the Lord" instead of "the Lord appeared to." Different usages of the divine title seem to signal different nuances of the narratives. Inter-textual research on the opening phrases in relationship with the different divine titles is required.

### 2.4.3 Inter-textual Study on Different Deity Titles

It is a general understanding that "the angel of the Lord" speaks to man on behalf of Yahweh. In other words, "the angel of the Lord" speaks in a divine voice (Gn 16:10; Ex 3:2, 6; Judg 6:34; 1 Chr 12:19; 2 Chr 24:20; Propp 1964:198; Harris et al

1980:465). The divine title “the angel of the Lord” is identified with Yahweh through the descriptive style of parataxis by the authors both in the book of Genesis and Judges (cf. Gn 16:13; Jdg 13:6, 9; Speiser 1964:118; Mathews 1996:187-189; Lundbom 1998:140; Lockshin 1989:59). Therefore, messengers can speak as if they were the sender himself (cf. Jdg 11:13; 2 Sm 3:12; Houtman 1993:335).

However, “the angel of the Lord” must not be identified with the actual Yahweh himself (cf. Bush 1993:40; Propp: 1999:198). Exodus 33:2-3 apparently shows such fact: “I will send an angel before you ... *But I will not go with you*, because you are a stiff-necked people.” Here the nuance of the expression “I will send an angel” without the presence of Yahweh surely shows the unpleasing mood of the Lord against the Israelites. Therefore, people expressed a deep repentance in response to the word (cf. Ex 33:4), and the Lord changed his mind and appeared in the tent of meeting again and said, “*My presence* will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Ex 33:14; Durham 1987:436-437).

It clearly shows that the nuance of “angel’s going” is quite different from going of the Lord’s own presence (cf. Howard 1993:115). Accompanying of God himself denotes giving favor for his covenant partners (cf. Durham 1987:447). Theodore of Mopsuestia (quoted by Oden 2002:73) said:

> “It is significant too that where there was an announcement of good things, the Lord was present. But when the subject is punishment, he does not appear in person ... Since he takes no pleasure in punishments but inflicts them only because of necessity, he makes use of underlings.”

In the book of Judges God speaks to wayward Israelites only through "the angel of the Lord." The Lord does not seem to be pleased with the overall atmosphere depicted by the book of Judges because of the Canaanization of Israel (cf. Block 1999:71; Howard 1993:99). In those theophanic episodes (Jdgs 6 & 13), there are tensions and suspense on the matter of the recognition of divine visitors, and the terrified responses are depicted vividly after the recognition of the deity (cf. Lk 1:11; Skinner 1980:299-302; Westermann 1985:274-275). Such a theological tension or narrative ambiguity may convey God's distance or divine transcendence rather than his showing intimacy (cf. Mathews 1996:189; Newsom 1992:299-305).

In the book of Genesis also, the author seems to imply a lesser-favored nuance when he uses the opening phrase "the angel of the Lord." For, the deity name "the angel of the Lord" is used regarding a trouble-making Hagar (Gn 16:7, 9, 10, 11; 21:17; cf. Wenham 1994:10; Mathews 1996:188). Only "two angels" without "the Lord" visit wicked Sodom city where Lot dwells (Gn 19:1; cf. Gn 13:10; Hamilton 1976:392; Mathews 1996:136). In the case of Abraham, the expression "the angel of the Lord" is used only when God tests Abraham (Gn 22:11, 15). This is the apparent textual information given in the macro narrative context, to which readers must pay attention (cf. Knight 2004:169). Surely the author implies different theological intents by using different deity titles (cf. Hamilton 1995:30).

Therefore, the phrase, "The Lord appeared to him" in Genesis 18 must be interpreted as a prolepsis signaling blessedness. Descriptions of terrified responses after the recognition of his deity are not necessary. The divine title "the Lord" is used for the most privileged one to whom God reveals his blessed presence and when He speaks to his favored one in person from the first moment of encounter (cf. Sarna 1989:112;

Hamilton 1976:419; Skinner 1980:278). Abraham was privileged so much as to speak to the Lord face to face (cf. Nm 12:8; Gn 15:2; Sarna 1989:112; Hamilton 1976:419). Thus, the opening phrase, "the Lord appeared to" demonstrates God's blessed favor for his intimate covenant partner (Gn 18:1) as opposed to the phrase "the angel of the Lord appeared to." In the Greek mythology, however, the motif for deities' visit is to test the hospitality of a host. So gods therefore appear in plain human form.

### 2.4.4 The Test Motive View based on Greek Mythology

Generally in the Old Testament the anthropomorphic appearance of a divine being is done through "a single angel of the Lord" (cf. Jos 5:13; Jdg 6:11; 13:3; 2 Sm 24:16; Bush 1981:282-283). But in the episode of Genesis 18 the Lord appeared in the form of three men, which is of exceptional significance in the Old Testament (cf. Von Rad 1972:205). Some scholars even assume that this is a reminiscent of pagan polytheism and therefore attempt to interpret the narrative using retribution theology (cf. Gunkel 1997:193-194; Skinner 1980:299; Simpson 1978:616; Wenham 1994:45). Among many Greek myths, the account of the birth of Orion was compared as the nearest parallel: Zeus, Poseidon, and Hermes visit the childless Hyrieus in Boeotia. The childless Hyrieus served them hospitably, and they helped him acquire the son he longed for (cf. Gunkel 1997:192-193; Skinner 1980:302-303; Simpson 1978:616-617; Ross 1988:338; Letellier 1995:200-201).

Hospitality is the only real virtue to be tested in pagan parallels (cf. Von Rad 1972:205; Roop 1987:126). So the purpose of the Lord's visit is understood as testing Abraham in the fashion of Greek legends (cf. Gunkel 1997:193; Simpson 1978:616-617; Skinner 1980:299). Consequently it is understood that the incognito visitors give a

majestic reward because of the hospitality of the host (cf. Skinner 1980:302-303; Von Rad 1972:205; Wenham 1994:45).

There are, however, three reasons why we cannot use pagan theology to read the Hebrew narrative. Firstly Greek parallels come from a much later period than the Abraham narrative and also from a different culture, so that their connection must be quite indirect (cf. Westermann 1985:276; Ross 1988:341). If one accepts that being hospitable to visitors was taken for granted and was a common cultural duty in ancient Near East, then, attention must be paid to other significant elements of the narrative (cf. Exell 1900:1; Von Rad 1972:206; Westermann 1985:276; 1995:Hamilton 8; Bush 1981:282).

Secondly the Greek style of narrating is widely different from that of Hebrew. Lundbom (1998:136-138) explains the differences between them comparatively as follows:

> ”Greek epic style is essentially hypotactic … descriptions are commonplace and in them much detail. Syntactic connection between narrative parts show clear results and remains nothing obscure … Hebrew epic style is essentially paratactic, that is, a style typified by economy of detail ... Syntactic connections are few in number, which remain in obscurity. Feelings and thoughts of persons are not externalized, that is, motives are lacking and purposes remain unexpressed”.

Therefore, this study attempt to divert our attention to the author’s own theological view as expressed in the text as well as to the common theological perspective found among biblical parallels in the Old Testament.

Thirdly the retribution theology, which emphasizes only the meritorious works of Abraham, collides with the systematic central themes of the whole Abraham narrative (Gn 11:27-25:11; cf. Hasel 1998:77, 92; Westermann 1985:276). The author's theological view as expressed in the Abraham narrative emphasizes unilaterally God's grace in election, his giving of promises, and his faithfulness to fulfill his promise for the covenant partners (cf. Tenney 1977; Keiser 1979:89; Mathews 1996:122). There is a great difference whether the promise of seed is a gift from the Lord or whether it is a reward for hospitable manners (cf. Westermann 1985:276; Von Rad 1972:209).

Many scholars have been interpreting Abraham's act of invitation of the heavenly visitors as a good illustration of being hospitable for strangers according to the perspective of Hebrews 13:2 in the New Testament (cf. Ambrose, Augustine; Oden 2002:62-64; Calvin 1992:468; Hamilton 1995:9; Wenham 1994:45; Brueggemann 1997:166; Exell 1900:1-5). The result of this interpretation produces the same retribution theology, which is far from the Lord's faithfulness to fulfill what he promised.

### 2.4.5 The Interpretative Perspective by the Word of Hebrews 13:2

NIV translates the word of Hebrews 13: 2 as "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." Scholars simply took the Abraham and Lot narratives as the ideal examples of Christian hospitality. They also asserted that Abraham received Isaac and Lot got the deliverance from the doomed disaster as the reward of their hospitality (cf. Simpson 1978:616; Gunkel 1997:192-193). Such a theological interpretation has been widely used since the early church fathers (cf. Hamilton 1995:9; Oden 2002:64; Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel

1997:192; Jarick 2000:86). Many traditional Old Testament commentators also did not seem to pay much attention to the author's own sophisticated interpretative perspective in the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15).

There are, however, some reasons why we should not use this interpretative perspective of Hebrews 13:2 to understand the Fellowship narrative properly (Gn 18:1-15). Firstly, the interpretation is based on an improper English translation of the Greek verse in Hebrews 13:2, `th/j filoxeni,aj mh. evpilanqa,nesqe\ dia. tau,thj ga.r e;laqo,n tinej xeni,santej avgge,loujÅ` The various translations of the verse can be compared in several translations as follows:

KJV Hebrews 13:2 "Be not forgetful to entertain (strangers): for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

NIV Hebrews 13:2 "Do not forget to entertain (strangers), for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it"

YLT Hebrews 13:2 of the hospitality ( ) be not forgetful, for through this unawares certain did entertain messengers;

The YLT's translation shows a literal translation. In the Greek text of Hebrew 13:2, there is no word for "strangers." Therefore, a literal translation may be done as follows: "Do not forget to do hospitality, for thereby some have entertained angels (or messengers) without knowing it." The object of receiving hospitality is not mentioned in the original text. The object is to be decided by the context of the admonition on Hebrews 13:1-4.

The older English version (KJV) inserted the term "strangers" as the object of

the sentence presenting the theological view of contemporaries. This very interpretation caused an improper understanding of the words of Hebrews 13:2. Exegetical debate on the object on hospitality is a controversial issue among New Testament theologians. The author of the book of Hebrews might have intended to imply a brotherly love for totally unknown *xenos* (xevnoj "alien, stranger") or proselytes (prosh,lutoj, "Christian converts") from the Gentiles, including fellow-Christians (cf. Milligan 1989:481).

The visitors in Genesis 18 are not "strangers" (aliens) in the literal sense indicated above nor the "proselytes," but rather the mystic "three men" who appeared suddenly at noontime (cf. Skinner 1980:299; Sarna 1989:128; Westermann 1985:276; Letellier 1995:80; Simpson 1978:617; Gunkel 1997:192; Exell 1900:2). Each description used to indicate how Abraham welcomed the three men connotes that they are very superior to Abraham so that one can hardly imagines that he is showing a brotherly love for poor and weary ones (strangers or foreigners) (Gn 18:1-15; cf. Bush 1981:283.

Recent New Testament scholars generally agree that the object of hospitality is towards "fellow-Christians" or "Christian converts from the Gentiles" (cf. Mt 25:35, 40; Rm 12:10-13; Tm 3:2; Tt 1:18; Pt 4:8; Didache 11; Buchanan 1972:230; Ellingworth 1993:694; Lane 1991:511). Ellingworth (1993:694) asserts, "Just as in rabbinic tradition hospitality is largely limited to fellow-Jews, so the NT generally presupposes a situation in which traveling evangelists have a special claim on the hospitality of the local congregation." Thus, the main theme of Hebrews 13:1-3 is giving the precept that emphasizes the practice of expended brotherly love, especially for those who are in need among the early members of the Christian community (cf. Lane 1991:511). If the translators intended to be hospitable for "Christian converts," they should have

translated it as “proselytes” instead of “strangers.”

Because the same theme is found in the Old Testament (Lv 19:33-34): “The alien (rGE) living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as your self, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” The LXX translates the term rG (*gaer*: “alien or foreigner”) as prosh,lutoj, *(proselytos*), which means “proselyte” (convert from pagan religion) instead of simply as *xenos* (xevnoj, alien) (Lv 19:34; cf. Milligan 1989:481).

Secondly, one of the main themes of the narrative complex (Gn 18 and 19) is that the Lord has to punish the wicked because of “out cry” reached to Him (cf. Gn 6-9; cf. Hartley 1995:177; Mathews 1996:208-215). The narrator clearly tells that (Gn 19:29) “he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe,” which means that Lot was not delivered on his own merits (or righteousness or his being hospitable for two strangers) but through Abraham’s intercession (cf. Wenham 1994:59). Lot’s customary hospitality for strangers was not the essential reason for his getting salvation. According to nomadic customs showing hospitality for visitors was taken for granted (cf. Westermann 1985:276). Then, why his hospitable manner should be praised significantly by the perspective of Hebrews 13:2? They are not relevant to each other.

Thirdly, the Hebrew writer’s depiction, “Have entertained angels without knowing” (Heb 13:2) squarely conflicts with the depiction of Genesis narrator about Abraham’s keen act of “observation and recognition” by the formal vocabulary of prophecy “and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo!”(hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: ‘wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw:] (cf. Gn 24:63; 37:25; 43:29; Jdg 19:17; Ezk 1:4, 15, 26; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9; Zch 5:5; Mathews 1996.216; Letellier 1995:81). The physical meaning of the verb har also denotes the sense of perception with the eyes (cf. Van Gemeren

1997:1007-1014). Thus, the meaning of Hebrew verb Qal of `har` ("to perceive," "understand," and "learn") contradicts the depiction of "without knowing it" (cf. Gn 1:10, 12; Ex 3:4; 8:11; Sarna 1989:92; Botterweck 1974; Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980).

The author's own interpretative perspective within the Hebron narrative (Gn 17-18:33) must be considered to interpret the Fellowship Narrative properly (Gn 18:1-15). This study finds that the episode at Hebron (Gn 17:7-18:33) shows a similar sequential plot structure of other biblical parallel in Exodus 24:1-18.

### 2.4.6 Inter-textual Study on the Sequential Plots between the Hebron narrative (Gn 17:7-18:33) and the Covenant narrative in Exodus 24:1-18

In the earlier stage of God's calling of Moses, like in the case of Abraham, he only heard the words of the Lord (Ex 3:4-17; 6:1, 28; 7:1, 14, 19; 8:1, 16, 20; 9:1; 10:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1; 16:4; 17:5). Later on in Exodus 24, "the gift" of eating covenant meals in God's Presence was given to Moses along with seventy elders in the same way Abraham experienced it (cf. Henry 1712:380; Durham 1987:344-345; Ellison 1982:136). Therefore, it seems to be very significant to compare the sequential plots of both covenantal events (Gn 17:7-18:33 and Ex 24:1-18). The rites of making a covenant may be arranged as follows:

(1) Performing covenant rites between the Lord and His people (Ex 24:3-8)

(2) Eating fellowship meals in God's Presence is granted (Ex 24:9-11)

(3) Moses entered into the cloud of God's glory to receive the tablets of the Ten Commandment and stayed there for 40 days (Ex 24:12-18)

A similar sequence is found in the events at Hebron (Gn 17 and 18) as follows:

(1) Performing the covenant of circumcision on every male in Abraham's household (Gn 17:7-27)
(2) Eating the fellowship meals of the Lord is granted (all the household of Abraham is assumed to eat: Gn 18:1-8)
(3) Abraham received the word of reconfirmation, he walked along with the Lord and had an intimate dialogue with him over Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 18:9-33)

What is significant here is that the gift of a fellowship meal was given immediately after the performing covenant rite. Thus, the sequence of events at Abraham's camp is in agreement with those at Mountain Sinai in regard to the covenant making and eating of meals (cf. Ross 1988:339). Here, I presume an unwritten element in the fellowship meals at Abraham's camp. It is that all members of Abraham's household also participated in Abraham's table. For, according to Near Eastern culture, usually all of the household members enjoy the leftover of the prepared food for the guests (cf. Bush 1981:288; Exell 1900:5; Ross 1988:343).

There is a significant comparative feature between historical narratives (Jdg 6 & 13) and patriarchal narratives (Abraham and Moses). It is that the theophanic events in the book of Judges 6 & 13 happened as the first experience of the judge in his lifetime, whereas, theophanic events in patriarchal narratives occurred at the pinnacle stage of their life after they had already experienced God's revelations in various ways (Gn 18;

Ex 24). Therefore, in the episodes of the patriarchal narratives (Gn 17:7-18:33; Ex 24:1-18), there are no depictions of the patriarch's terrified response to the theophany. But in the historical narratives of the judges (Jdg 6 and 14), the depictions of scared and terrified responses of the covenant partners are vivid. It implies that the Lord grants Abraham and Moses to share intimate fellowship with him compared to other covenant partners who only encountered God's presence for the first time in their life (cf. Buber 1982:39; Sailhamer 1976:137; Durham 1987:344-345; Ellison 1982:136**).**

The co-relationship between executing circumcision and consequently eating meals reminds me of another parallel of the anthropomorphic appearance of the deity in the book of Joshua 5. I expect some new key points in the following inter-textual study in the following section (2.1.9.1) would enhance a better understanding of the significance of the events at Hebron.

### 2.4.7 Inter-Textual Study between Genesis 18 and Joshua 5 Concerning Circumcision and Theophany

Both theophanic events occurred immediately before God executed justice over wicked cities (cf. Speiser 1964:139; Harris 1980). Both episodes report the same mass circumcision rites and the same anthropomorphic appearance of the Lord after the rites (cf. Henry 1708:27; Soggin 1972:70). Both narratives use the same phrase "and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo!"(hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw:; Gn 18:2; Jos 5:13]. Both episodes describe the divine men having the same "firm standing" posture: "stand"(bcn; Gen 18:2); "stand" (dm[; Jos 5:13). Both covenant partners bowed down to the ground as they discerned the identity of the ones who suddenly appeared to them. Therefore, it seems to be significant to do research on the

structural co-relationship between mass circumcision and the Lord's visit using inter-textual study. To do research on common terms and their theological nuances seems to be significant in this regard.

The narrative of Joshua 5:1-15 tells of three important historical incidents (mass circumcision, eating Passover, theophany), being essential to Israel's identity (cf. Bright 1978:573; Butler 1983:55). The sequence of both events may be arranged as follows:

Episode from Genesis 17:23-19:29

(1) Doing mass circumcision (Gn 17:23-27)

(2) Theophany in Human Form to Abraham as the pinnacle of his devoted life (Gn 18:1-5)

(3) Having Fellowship meals, which is proleptic for Passover (Gn 18:6-8)

(4) God executed justice over wicked Sodom (giving salvation to Lot's family; Gn 19)

Episode from Joshua 5:2-6:27

(1) Doing mass circumcision (Jos 5:2-9)

(2) Celebrating of Passover (Jos 5:10)

(3) Theophany in Human Form to Joshua for the first time in his devoted life (Jos 5:13-15)

(4) God's executing justice on Jericho (giving salvation to Rahab's household (Jos 6:22-23)

Thus, both narratives (Gn 17-18; Jos 5:1-15) show a similar plot structure

(sequence of events) in similar contexts. The most significant feature of both narratives is that the divine visitor's appearance occurred right after the obedient performing of mass circumcision (cf. Jos 5:2-9; Henry 1708:27; Bright 1978:573; Gn 17:23-27; Sailhamer 1976:143; Ross 1988:341; Sarna 1989:128; Wenham 1994:41). The passage is generally understood among modern scholars as the work of the Deuteronomic historian, who considered circumcision as essential to become a member of God's covenant people (cf. Bright 1978:574; North 1943:40-41; Howard 1998:29; Butler 1983: xx, 58, 62). Bright (1978:574) assumes that the Deuteronomic historian added the passage in Joshua 5:4-7 to harmonize this tradition with the one dated back to Abraham. The circumcision episodes are always illustrations of Israel's faithful obedience. Consequently the appearance of the divine man must be interpreted as God's favoring presence among his covenant partners in response to their obedience (cf. Bright 1978:573; Henry 1708:27; Howard 1998:161).

There are also many other similar descriptive elements that should be noticed in both narratives (Gn 17-18; Jos 5:1-15). To compare their theological nuances seem to be significant. Firstly the phrase "and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo!(hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw:)" often signals an important imminent event (cf. Gn 24:63; 43:29; Jdg 19:17; Mathews 1996.216). But the Hebrew verb Qal of har ("to look at") belongs to the formal vocabulary of prophecy as well (cf. Sarna 1989:92; Botterweck 1974). So, the verb has the metaphorical meaning of "perceive," "understand," and "learn" (Gn 1:10, 12; Ex 3:4; 8:11; cf. Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980:823; Van Gemeren 1997:1007-1014). Thus, the word pair of "lift up his eyes and saw" is understood as the tautological expression for the process of prophetic keen "observation and recognition" (cf. Gn 24:63; 37:25; 43:29; Ezk 1:26; 8:2; Zch 5:5; Ezk

1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9; Jdg 19:17; Letellier 1995:81; Mathews 1996:216; Botterweck 1974). Then, such nuance of the word pair implies that both Abraham and Joshua were favored enough to recognize the identity of the divine ones appearing to them. This is the textual proof of Abraham's immediate recognition of the deity from the first moment.

Secondly the divine men are depicted in the posture of "firm standing" (bcn) in both Abraham's episode (Gn 18:2) and Joshua's episode (cf. Brown 1979). Even though in Joshua's episode a different verb (dm[] for standing posture is used, the depiction of divine man "with drawn sword in his hand" apparently gives the same nuance of firm standing as in Genesis 18:2. Such depictions remind one of the ominous and authoritative standing of the angel of the Lord in Balaam's episode (Nm 22:31; cf. 2 Sm 24:16). Such overwhelming and authoritative standing posture of deities might have caused Abraham and Joshua to bow down to the ground before them (Gn 18:8, 22; Jos 5:15; cf. Henry 1708:27; Bright 1978:573, 576). Contextually the nuance of "bow down" does not seem to be a civil respect but the worshipping act to the Lord (cf. Ex 24:26; Ex 20:5; 2 Ch 7:3; Is 2:20; 44:15: 46:6; Brown 1979).

Thirdly both narratives use a surprised depiction of hNEhi ("Lo!") but do not describe any terrified response to the divine man's appearance. Then, the purpose of the divine man's surprise visit may be understood as a hopeful and blessed one as the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" denotes a well wishing purpose (cf. Butler 1983:62; Auld 1984:35; Henry 1708:27; Howard 1998:161; Sarna 1989:112; Hamilton 1976:419; Skinner 1980:278). Then, Abraham and Joshua are honored by the Lord's favorable appearance.

Such similar motives in the plot structures of divine visits, and the many similar narrative terms used give us a common interpretative perspective. Out of a well wishing

purpose the Lord visits his beloved covenant partners who obeyed the Lord's command of circumcision. Therefore, this study asserts that the test motif visit of the Lord is not relevant with these common interpretative perspectives indicated above in similar parallels.

### 2.4.8 Summary

**Linking Structure between Genesis 18 with Genesis 17**

The opening phrase, "the Lord appeared to him" (Gn 18:1a) is significant, for it links chapter 18 with chapter 17. Syntactically the antecedent of "him" is Abraham as referred to in Genesis 17:26. The name Abraham is found in the account of circumcision (Gn 17:23-27). Abraham performed circumcision promptly and obediently "on the same (or very) day" (Gn 17:23 and 26). Therefore, the opening line of the narration of chapter 18 must be understood as being closely bound with the preceding event (Gn 17:23-27) as the author indicates syntactically. The author used the same inter-depending linking structure in Genesis 15:1.

**Theological Nuance of "the Lord appeared to" in the Larger Context**

Firstly the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" is used to indicate that it is the Lord who visits a person and always gives covenant partners a hopeful promise for both land and descendants (Gn 12:7; 17:1-8; 26:2-4; 35:9-13). The phrase "the Lord appeared to" signals the well-wishing purpose of the visit of the Lord.

Secondly there is no description about the covenant partners' terrified response in the episodes narrated with the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" like in other theophany parallels (cf. Jdg 6 & 13). Therefore, the opening phrase signals the Lord's

intimacy with his beloved one who has already experienced his theophany many times (cf. Gn 35:9).

Thirdly within the episodes initiated with the deity title of "the Lord" God always appears to encourage his beloved servant by saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield" (Gn 15:1), "I will be with you" (Gn 26:3), "I am with you," "I will not leave you" (Gn 28:15). Then, the phrase "the Lord appeared to" signals His great comfort and encouragement toward his covenant partners.

Fourthly the opening phrase signals the more distinct and vivid revelation of the Lord. The Nifal form of the verb `har` (*ra-a*) is a technical term for divine self-disclosure meaning, "to reveal oneself," "to be seen," and "to be visible." Therefore, the theophanic verb `ar'ÛYEw` ("appeared") in the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" may be interpreted as *"he revealed himself visibly."*

Fifthly in the following events started by the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to," the Lord grants Abraham to participate as a privileged prophet in divine council like a friend (Gn 18:16-33; cf. 2 Chr 20:7). One may conclude that Abraham is represented by this formula as someone who is greater than just an ordinary prophet. Abraham is a fitting prototype for the great prophets (cf. Gn 18:17; 2 Chr 20:7).

**Different Opening Phrases with Different Deity Titles**

In the days of Judges God speaks to wayward Israelites only through "the angel of the Lord." The Lord does not seem to be pleased with the overall atmosphere of the book of Judges because of the Canaanization of Israel. In the book of Genesis also, the author implies a lesser-favored nuance when he uses the opening phrase "the angel of the Lord." For, the deity name "the angel of the Lord" is used only toward a trouble-

making Hagar (Gn 16:7, 9, 10, 11; 21:17). Only “two angels” without “the Lord” visit wicked Sodom city where Lot dwells (Gn 19:1;cf. Gn 13:10). In the case of Abraham, the expression “the angel of the Lord” is used only when God tests Abraham (Gn 22:11, 15). Surely the author implies different theological intents by using different deity titles. Thus the phrase, “The Lord appeared to him” in Genesis signals blessedness. Descriptions of terrified responses after the recognition of his deity are not necessary.

**The Test Motive View based on Greek Mythology**

In the Greek mythology, the motif for deities’ visit is to test the hospitality of a host. So the purpose of the Lord’s visit is understood as testing Abraham in the fashion of Greek legends. Consequently it is understood that the incognito visitors give a majestic reward because of the hospitality of the host. There are three reasons why we cannot use pagan theology to read the Hebrew narrative. Firstly Greek parallels come from a much later period than the Abraham narrative and also from a different culture. Being hospitable to visitors was taken for granted and was a common cultural duty in ancient Near East. Attention must be paid to other significant elements of the narrative.

Secondly the Greek style of narrating is widely different from that of Hebrew. Greek epic style is essentially hypotactic, descriptions are much more in detail. Syntactic connection between narrative parts show clear results and remains nothing obscure. Hebrew epic style is essentially paratactic. It is a style typified by economy of detail. Syntactic connections are few in number, which remain in obscurity. Feelings and thoughts of persons are not externalized, that is, motives are lacking and purposes remain unexpressed.

Thirdly the retribution theology, which emphasizes only the meritorious works

of Abraham, collides with the author's theological view emphasizing unilaterally God's grace in election, his giving of promises, and his faithfulness to fulfill his promise for the covenant partners. There is a great difference whether the promise of seed is a gift from the Lord or whether it is a reward for hospitable manners.

**The Interpretative Perspective by the Word of Hebrews 13:2**

Many scholars interpret Abraham's act of invitation according to the perspective of Hebrews 13:2 in the New Testament. The result of this interpretation produces the same retribution theology. There are some reasons why we should not use this interpretative perspective. Firstly, in the Greek text of Hebrew 13:2, there is no word for "strangers." The older English version (KJV) inserted the term "strangers" as the object of the sentence presenting the theological view of contemporaries.

The author of the book of Hebrews might have intended to imply a brotherly love for totally unknown *xenos* (xevnoj "alien, stranger") or proselytes (prosh,lutoj, "Christian converts") from the Gentiles, including fellow-Christians. Recent New Testament scholars generally agree that the object of hospitality as towards "fellow-Christians" or "Christian converts from the Gentiles" (cf. Mt 25:35, 40; Rm 12:10-13; Tm 3:2; Tt 1:18; Pt 4:8). The main theme of Hebrews 13:1-3 is giving the precept that emphasizes the practice of expended brotherly love for fellow-Christians.

The visitors in Genesis 18, however, are not "strangers" (aliens) in the literal sense indicated above nor "proselytes," but rather the mystic "three men" who appeared suddenly at noontime. Each description used to indicate how Abraham welcomed the three men connotes that they are very superior to Abraham so that one can hardly imagine that he is showing a brotherly love for poor and weary ones (strangers or

foreigners).

Secondly, one of the main themes of the narrative complex in Genesis 18 and19 is about why the Lord had to punish Sodom and Gomorrah and why some of people are delivered and encouraged in the midst from the doomed destruction as happened in the great flood narrative (Gn 6-9). It has nothing to do with practicing extended brotherly love. According to nomadic customs showing hospitality for visitors was taken for granted.

Thirdly, the book of Hebrew's writer in his depiction of "Have entertained angels without knowing" (Heb 13:2), squarely conflicts with the depiction of Genesis narrator about Abraham's keen act of "observation and recognition" by the formal vocabulary of prophecy "and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo!" (cf. Gn 24:63; 37:25; 43:29; Jdg 19:17; Ezk 1:4, 15, 26; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9; Zch 5:5). Especially the metaphorical meaning of Hebrew verb Qal of har ("to perceive," "understand," and "learn") contradicts the depiction of "without knowing it" (cf. Gn 1:10, 12; Ex 3:4; 8:11).

**Sequential Plots of the Hebron narrative (Gn 17:7-18:33) and Those in Exodus 24:1-18**

In Exodus 24, "the gift" of eating covenant meals in God's Presence was given to Moses along with seventy elders in the same way Abraham experienced. What is significant here is that the gift of a fellowship meal was given immediately after the performing covenant rite. Theophanic events (Gn 18; Ex 24) in patriarchal narratives occurred at the pinnacle stage of their life after they had already experienced God's revelations variously. Therefore, in those episodes (Gn 17:7-18:33; Ex 24:1-18), there are no depictions of the patriarch's terrified response to the theophany. But in the

historical narratives of the judges (Jdg 6 and 14), the depictions of terrified responses of the covenant partners are vivid. It implies that the Lord grants Abraham and Moses to share intimate fellowship with Him compared to other covenant partners who only encountered God's presence for the first time in their life.

**Genesis 18 and Joshua 5 Concerning Circumcision and Theophany**

The narrative of Joshua 5:1-15 tells of three important historical incidents (mass circumcision, eating Passover, theophany), being essential to Israel's identity. Both episodes (Gn 18 and Jos 5) report the same mass circumcision rites and the same anthropomorphic appearance of the Lord after the rites. Both narratives use the same phrase "and he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo!"(hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw:; Gn 18:2; Jos 5:13]. Both episodes describe the divine men having the same "firm standing" posture: "stand"(bcn; Gen 18:2); "stand" (dm[; Jos 5:13]. Such depictions remind one of the ominous and authoritative standing of the angel of the Lord in Balaam's episode (Nm 22:31; cf. 2 Sm 24:16). Such overwhelming and authoritative standing posture of deities might have caused Abraham and Joshua to vow down to the ground before them (Gn 18:8, 22; Jos 5:15). For in both covenant partners bowed down to the ground as they discerned the identity of the ones who suddenly appeared to them.

Both narratives (Gn 17-18; Jos 5:1-15) show a similar plot structure (sequence of events) in similar contexts. The most significant feature of both narratives is that the divine visitor's appearance occurred right after the obedient performing of mass circumcision (cf. Jos 5:2-9; Gn 17:23-27). The circumcision episodes are always illustrations of Israel's faithful obedience. Consequently the appearance of the divine

man must be interpreted as God's favoring presence among his covenant partners in response to their obedience.

Both narratives use a surprised depiction of `hNEhi` ("Lo!") but do not describe any terrified response to the divine man's appearance. Then, the purpose of the divine man's surprise visit may be understood as a hopeful and blessed one. Then, Abraham and Joshua are honored by the Lord's favorable appearance.

Such similar motives in the plot structures of divine visits, and the many similar narrative terms used give us a common interpretative perspective. The test motif visit of the Lord is not relevant with these common interpretative perspectives indicated above in similar parallels.

# CHAPTER THREE: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST SCENE AND ITS THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCES (GN 18:1-8)

In the first scene of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-8), the author describes his character's appearance and actions briefly (cf. Chisolm 2006:29; Venter 2005:11). Therefore, scholars assume those nuances diversely. The time of Abraham's recognition of the deity and its significance is diverse (Gn 18:9, 13, 15; cf. Wenham 1994:47-49; Calvin 1992:478; Sailhamer 1976:144). The motif of God's visit and its theological understanding is diverse (cf. Ross 1988:343; Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:192). Theological understanding of receiving the promised son is diverse (cf. Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:192; Oden 2002:61-64; Calvin 1992:478; Hamilton 1995:17; Sailhamer 1976:144).

These controversial issues need to be investigated and solved not by probable assumptions but by the proper exegesis of the narrative text. Readers may find the author's sophisticated skill to present the narrative as a tightly structured one (cf. Wikipedia: 2009). Each repeated word and phrase also was chosen skillfully by the narrator (cf. Venter 2006:9-10). The narrative remarks and the symbolic meaning of the setting also guide the nuances of Abraham's each action (cf. Westermann 1985:277; Mathews 1996:217; Venter 2005:11). By the method of narrative criticism all of these narrative elements will be explained in this chapter (cf. Knight 2004:169-171; Mathews 1999:209). Synchronic method will be used to investigate the significance of the words and phrases (cf. McCartney & Clayton 1994:112).

### 3.1 Structure of the first Scene and it significance (Gn 18:1-8)

Initially the narrative begins with the unexpected arrival of strangers. Secondly Abraham runs hurriedly to welcome them. Thirdly a word of invitation is spoken: a short dialogue occurs between Abraham and the visitors at the initial moment of welcome. Finally Abraham and Sarah prepared an extraordinary table for them (cf. Westermann 1985:276). The actions of the starting event are structured as follows (cf. Roop 1987:125; Mathews 1996:217):

18:1a Opening phrase of the author

18:1b-2a Sudden appearance of the visitors and Abraham's watchful looking up

18:2b Abraham's running to welcome them and bowing down to the ground

18:3-5 Abraham's respectful words of invitation to the visitors

18:6-8 Abraham and Sarah prepare an extraordinary meal for them to eat

The opening phrase "The Lord appeared to him" (v.1a) functions as a heading for the whole narrative complex (Gn 18-19; Mathews 1996:216; Westermann 1985:276; Wenham 1994:45). By the phrase the narrator signifies what is about to take place as an appearance of Yahweh to Abraham in order that the reader might understand what is happening (cf. Skinner 1980:299; Hartley 1995:177). However, the description of the motif of God's appearance in human form seems to be lacking (cf. Lundbom 1998:136-138). There is no depiction about terrified response to the theophany like other parallels depict graphically (cf. Jdg 6:22-23; 13:22-23). Therefore, the narrative seems to give tension in the reader's mind arousing his/her curiosity (cf. Venter 2005:9). The depiction about the identity of the visitors is paratactic, and there is no narration about recognition

of deity so that their identities seem to remain in obscurity (cf. Hamilton 1995:7). Gunkel (1997:198) asked the question: “Did Abraham recognize the deity from the very beginning or in the course of the conversation?” Scholars differed on whether to assume immediate recognition of the deity or not (cf. Sarna 1989:129).

The invitation and the entertainment are similar to Genesis 19:1-3, but what is significant is that Abraham’s act of hospitality is depicted in more detail (Gen 18:1-8) than Lot’s hospitality (Gn19:1-3; cf. Westermann 1985:300; Wenham 1994:53). Therefore, this comparative difference has been interpreted as indicating that Abraham is more virtuous and has more meritorious works than that of Lot (cf. Mathews 1996:213; von Rad 1972:216-117; Hartley 1995:177). This traditional interpretative view on the first scene finds significance only from the fact that Abraham acted more hospitably toward his visitors than Lot. The Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), however, shows a unique sequence of events. The event of the first scene is related with the former events in Genesis 17.

### 3.1.1 Unique Sequence of the First Scene as Shown by Inter-textual Study

Analyzing the plot structure of a narrative helps readers to see the narrative’s unique feature and its function (cf. Chisholm 2006:34). The first two consecutive scenes here show a different sequential plot compared to the common plot structure found in other anthropomorphic theophany parallels (cf. Jdg 6 and 13). The sequential plot of the Abraham narrative here (Gn 18:1-15) can be outlined as follows: (1) Invitation to the table is done as initial event in the first scene (Gn 18:1-8); (2) Receiving the message is done at the second scene (Gn 18:9-15). In other parallels (Jdg 6 and 13), the sequence is: (1) Hearing the message is done initially. (2) Offering food for the messenger is done

at the last moment (Jdg 6:11-24 and 13:1-25; cf. Block 1999:256-264, 399-420). They may be compared as follows:

Theophany to Abraham (Gn 18:1-15)

(1) Gn 18:1-8, Invitation to the table is done initially

(2) Gn 18:9-15, Receiving the message of reconfirmation is done without any terrified response

Theophany to Gideon (Jdg 6:11-24)

(1) Jdg 6:11-16, Hearing the message of calling first

(2) Jdg 6:17-24, Offering food for the messenger and terrified response to the theophany

Theophany to Samson's parents (Jdg 13:1-25)

(1) Jdg 13:1-14, Hearing the message of calling initially

(2) Jdg 13:15-25, Offering food for the messenger and terrified response to the theophany

Then, what could be the theological significance of presenting the invitation to the table as the beginning of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15)? As it was indicated in chapter two, the linking structure of Genesis 17 and 18 may give readers the clue how to understand this presenting of the invitation at the start (see ch.2.1.6). Each preceding incident is the natural cause of that which follows (cf. Knight 2004:171; Gunkel 1994:50). Abraham performed the prompt circumcision obediently. (Gn 17:23

and 26), which emphasizes Abraham's revitalized faith and willing obedience (Gn 17:23a and 26; cf. Sailhamer 1976:142-143; von Rad 1972:203; Mathews 1996:207; Hartley 1995:175).

While in other parallels the divine man appeared to his covenant partners for the first time in their lives (Jdg 6:11-24; 13:1-25), in the Fellowship Narrative, the appearance of the Lord (Gn 18:1) happens consecutively in the same thematic context, but *right after* His appearance to Abraham introduced by the same opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" (Gn 17:1; cf. Hamilton 1995:5; Sarna 1989:128; Mathews 1996:195; see ch.2.1.7). Therefore, the Fellowship narrative must not be interpreted as an independent episode, for this narrative begins in midstream between the preceding episode (Gn 17:1-27) and the following one (second section of the Hebron narrative; Gn 18:16-33; cf. Coats 137-138).

Readers are asked to interpret the author's theological intent from the use of the same opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" (Gn 17:1 and 18:1). For it reflects the narrator's theological standpoint (cf. Wenham 1994: 45; Hamilton 1995:7; Westermann 1985:277; Shailhamer 1976:142). The author might have alluded that Abraham was acquainted with the visible appearance of the Lord already in former events (Gn 17:1; cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Youngblood 1991:34-35; Mathews 1996:192-193; Hamilton 1990:460). That could be the most probable reason for inviting heavenly visitors with a hearty welcome from the first moment of the theophany without being scared of them.

#### 3.1.1.1 Theological Perspective of the Sequence by Inter-textual Study

A similar sequence of events found in the narrative in Joshua 5:1-15, gives a clue to finding the significance (see ch.2.1.9.1). The most significant feature of both

narratives (Gn 17-18 & Jos 5:1-15) is that the divine visitor's appearance happened right after the obedient performing of mass circumcision (cf. Jos 5:2-9; Henry 1708:27; Bright 1978:573; Gn 17:23-27; Sailhamer 1976:143; Ross 1988:341; Sarna 1989:128; Wenham 1994:41). Then the appearance of the divine man must be interpreted as God's favorable presence among covenant partners in response to their obedience (cf. Bright 1978:573; Henry 1708:27; Howard 1998:161). Therefore, one may assume that Abraham recognized such a favorable appearance of the Lord right from the initial moment as it happened in Genesis 17:1.Then, the significance of offering meals as the first step may indicate two things.

Firstly the act of offering meals may be understood as the act of worship of Abraham who recognized the divinity of the visitors from the first moment of the theophany. Reading the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" in the larger narrative context helps us to understand the significance of the eating as the initial event in the theophany episode (see ch.2.1.7). As it was researched in chapter two, there is no description about the covenant partners' terrified response in this episode (cf. Bruegemann 1982:157). Because the opening phrase signals the Lord's friendly appearance to the one that already has experienced a divine encounter many times before (Gn 35:9; cf. Youngblood 1991:34-35; Mathews 1996:192-193).

Thus, the episode has nothing to do with the test motif for the visit of the Lord like it occurs in pagan parallels, which emphasize retribution theology (cf. Gunkel 1997:194; Skinner 1980:299; Simpson 1978:616; Gunkel 1997:193; Wenham 1994:45).

Secondly, the significance of offering meals at the start may indicate the Passover meal typologically. Readers are expected to consider the significance of preparing meals (Gn 18:3-8) in light of what had happened before and what will happen

next (Gn 17:23-27; 18:16-9:29; cf. Knight 2004:171; Coats 1983:137). The eating of the meal in Genesis 18 happened right after the mass circumcision (Gn 17:23-27), and after this the doomed destruction of Sodom and Gomorra happened like the doomed smite over the first born in Egypt (Gn 19:11-29; Ex 13:29). Getting circumcision (Gn 17:23-27) may allude the prerequisite requirement for eating the Passover meal (Gn 18:6-8; Ex 12:43-51). Surely the mass circumcision (Gn 17) becomes the prolepsis of the Exodus rules (Ex 12:43-51). Early church father Ambrose (Oden 2002:66) reads the Lord's eating (Gn 18:6-8) typologically as the shadow of the Passover meal (Ex 12:1-30).

The hasty mood of preparing meals in Genesis 18:6-7 looks similar to what happened in the very night of the Passover meal (cf. Ex 12:11, 20, 39; Harris 1980). The term of "Baked bread without yeast" (Gn 19:3) draws the attention of the readers, because it connotes the Passover meal (cf. Speiser 1964:139). The bread in Abraham's camp was made without the process of fermentation of dough because of the hurried kneading of three seahs of fine flour (Gn 18:6).

One may find a blessed cultic atmosphere for the setting in the episode of Genesis 18 as well. Because the depiction of the setting also signals what the author intends.

### 3.2 Settings of the First Scene (Gn 18:1-8)

Genesis 18:1 depicts the settings of the first and the second scene of the episode as follows (Gn 18:1-15): "near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day." Literally it depicts the geographical setting of the place where Abraham was encamped (cf. Licht 1978:132; Mathews 1996:210). The language used for depicting the scene uses the typical style of biblical narrative and it is

full of symbolic meanings (cf. Knight 2004:171; Venter 2005:5). Therefore, for readers who know the world in the ancient Near East, "the great trees" means more than its mere literal meaning, for, the expression also depicts a religious setting (cf. Sarna 1989:91; Martin 1975:83). The phrase "at the entrance to his tent" depicts a cultural dimension of the scene (cf. Bush 1981:282). And "in the heat of the day" depicts the temporal setting (cf. Ryken 1984:35).

### 3.2.1 Geographical Setting of Mamre at Hebron and its Theological Significance

The site of Mamre, which is located in the high mountain area (2800 ft high; cf. Tenney 1977), is usually identified with *Ramat elKhalil* about two miles north of Hebron, causing this narrative to be called the "Hebron Narrative" (Gn 18:1-33; cf. Harris 1980; Wenham 1987:299). The author of the Abraham narrative always links Abraham's dwelling places to high mountains, where the Lord appeared to him: Moreh at Shechem, Bethel (Gn 12:6, 8; 13:18; cf. Jdg 4:5; 9:37; Wenham 1987:279; Herris et al 1980; Driver 1979). Abraham built altars on those theophanic places (cf. Gn 28:10-22; 35:1-8; 12:6; Jdg 4:5; 9:37; Wenham 1987:279; Herris et al 1980; Driver 1979; Wenham 1994:222-223).

Thus, every theophanic site became a holy worship place in the Abraham narrative (cf. Gn 12:7; 15:1; 17:1; 28:17; Durham 1987:31). Abraham moved his tent near "the oaks trees" of Mamre in Hebron, where he built an altar to the Lord (Gn 13:18) and inaugurated the local sanctuary there (cf. Skinner 1980:254). Since then, Hebron becomes the central place in the Abraham narrative (cf. Wenham 1987:299). Thus, the high mountainous place of Mamre at Hebron functions as religious "focus space" in this episode (cf. Venter 2006:10; Westermann 1985:181). The geographical

setting in this episode apparently implies religious significances to readers who are familiar with this world (Gn 18:1-15). Awareness of such religious significance of high mountains is necessary for readers to understand Abraham's following action properly (cf. Chisholm 2006:27).

The place near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron reminds readers of the former events that happened between Abraham and Lot: their separation (Gn 13:10-13), and the rescue of Lot from the eastern kings' invasion with the help of the Amorite Mamre (Gn 14:13, 24; cf. Mathews 1996:216). Sailhamer (1990:142) asserts that the author wants us to see that Abraham has not moved since he settled near Mamre at Hebron, whereas, Lot moved down to a sinful city that is outside of the promised-land. Thus, Abram's abode inside Canaan is contrasted with Lot's abode outside Canaan (cf. Mathews 1996:137).

Therefore, it is significant for readers to pay attention to this geographical metaphor distinguishing between the holy mountain and the low lying wicked city (cf. Is 2:2; Knight 2004:171). The linage issue of the chosen and the rejected ones also is contrasted by means of the geographical perspective read in the larger context: Isaac versus Ishmael (Gn 18:1 and 19:1; cf. 16:21; 25:11, 18; 36:8-9, 40; 37:1; cf. Mathews 1996:137; Wenham 1987:297-298; Sarna 1989:99). Later Abraham purchased a plot of land with Macpelah cave at Hebron, which was a first step towards his descendants' acquisition of the whole land of Canaan (Gn 23:1-20; cf. Wenham 1994:130). During time of Joshua, Hebron was designated as a city of refuge, where the descendants of Aaron were assigned to dwell (Jos 20:7; 1Chr. 6:55-57; cf. 2 Sm 2:1-4). All these following events also seem to indicate that Hebron is no ordinary place.

### 3.2.2 Setting of "the great trees" and its Theological Significance (Gn 18:1a)

Hamilton (1990:395) gives botanical information of the great tree (!Alae *terebinth*): "It grows, on an average, to 20-25 feet, and has a thick trunk and heavy branches." The local name of the great tree is "*terebinth*" (native tree in Syria) producing glands similar to the oak in Western Europe, but also exuding a sweet-smelling resin (cf. Pettinger 1998:34-35). Cassuto (1992:325) gives another information about the !Alae (*terebinth*) and hla(*alla*):

> "names of a species of tall tree … attains to a height of approximately fifteen meters, and to an age of several centuries-even to more than a thousand years. On account of the size, strength and longevity of these towering trees, people honored and revered them, attributed to them a certain sanctity."

Usually the botanical description of a place also functions as a story's physical setting (cf. Chisholm 2006:26). Sarna (1989:91) introduces ancient cultic nuance of great trees as follows:

> "The phenomenon of a sacred tree … is well known in a variety of cultures. A distinguished tree, especially one of great antiquity, might be looked upon as the "tree of life" or as being "cosmic," its stump symbolizing the "navel of the earth" and its top representing heaven. In this sense, it is a bridge between the human and the divine spheres, and it becomes an arena of divine-human encounter, an ideal medium of oracles and revelation."

Thus the names of botanical items in the primeval historical narratives function symbolically to depict a theological message to the audience by visualizing the scene (cf. Gn 2:9; 3:1, 7, 22, 24; 8:11; 9:20; Wenham 1987:54). Abraham's life was associated with great trees (cf. Skinner 1980:246). He built his first altar to the Lord at the site of the great tree of Moreh (Gn 12:6-7) and built another altar near the great trees of Mamre in his earlier days (Gn 13:18). And when he established a new sanctuary at Beersheba, he planted a tamarisk tree there (Gn 21:33). Such frequent use of the word functions as a *Leitwort* or a key word that gives a clue to the author's theological intention in the Abraham narrative (cf. Venter 2006:9-10; Knight 2004:160).

Then, the phrase, "near the great trees" (or "*terebinths*" or "oak trees") depicts a religious and cultural dimension of the scene (cf. Ryken 1984:35). We need to pay attention to the cultic nuance of the great trees of Mamre (`are_m.m; ynEßl{aeB.`) in the Abraham narrative (cf. `!Alae` :12:6; 13:18; 18:1; 35:4, 8; `lv,a,` 21:33; Brown 1979). "The great trees" in this episode (Gn 18:1-15) remind readers of the Lord's former appearances, of Abraham building altars, and the inauguration of the local sanctuary there (Gn 12:6-7; 13:18; cf. Speiser 1964:97; Skinner 1980:254; Letellier 1995:81).

Deuteronomistic theologians might have been embarrassed by these written materials about the oak trees. For the place near "the great trees" became a controversial issue in later days in the Old Testament history because of the custom of pagan cults or syncretistic worship (cf. Is 2:13, 29-30; 6:13; 44:14; Jr 3:6; Ezk 27:6; Am 2:9; Hs 4:13; Gn 35:8; Harris 1980; Westermann 1985:181; Kuschel 1995:16). Two references in Isaiah (1:29; 57:5) show such negative association of "great trees" ("oaks") with false religion. Therefore, readers might also have such a negative perspective about "the great

trees." Then, one may question how the implied author handled such a problem in redacting the narrative.

Sarna (1989:92) raises a meaningful question on the exegesis of Genesis 12:7-8 by saying: "It is strange that there is no mention made of a sacrifice being offered." Every passage of Abraham's worship act describes simply as "building up altar and call the name of the Lord." However, exceptionally a sacrifice was offered on the altar of mount Moriah (Gn 22:13). If the final editor of the book of Genesis was living in such a troublesome era, he might have had agony in handling such materials like building altars on high places aside from Moriah by Abraham and following patriarchs (cf. Wenham 1994:104, 117). All altars except Jerusalem temple suffered destruction during the days of the Deuteronomic reformations by the Kings Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Ki 18:4; 23:1-20).

But within the Abraham narrative one may hardly find such a negative indication aside from the slight trace of redaction in the depictions about the altars (Gn 12:7-8; 22:3; cf. Wenham 1994:104). Almost all the worship places are signified symbolically by referring to great trees (cf. Gn 12:6, 13:18; 18:1; 21:33; Wenham 1987:299). According to the theological view of the implied author of the Abraham narrative, there is no hint of any negative cultic nuance or syncretistic cultic nuance about the great trees. We find a positive cultic significance of the great trees even in the book of Joshua 24:26 "Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord."

Readers find the same positive nuance of oak threes even within the book of Isaiah (Is 61:3d): "They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor (Is 61:3d)." In Isaiah 61:3d oaks are depicted metaphorically

as the people of God who will enjoy the restoration of the fortune in the year of the Lord's favor (cf. Moyter 1993:501). Then, we may understand that oaks originally displayed God's splendor, but pagan cults desecrated them. When there were acts of religious reformation by king Hezekiah and Josiah, man-made idols and shrines were destroyed, but God-made great oaks were not hacked (2 Ki 18:4; 23:4-20). During the days of Abraham, the holy sites near great trees did not seem to have any relationship with syncretistic practices yet. Rather both by traversing the land with great courage and by erection of altars for the Lord near great trees Abraham seemed to conquer the land symbolically (cf. Calvin 1948:377; Sailhamer 1976:112).

### 3.2.3 Setting of a Nomadic Tent Life and Noon Time

The circumstantial clause "as he was sitting at the entrance to his tent" depicts the physical setting of the narrative (cf. Ryken 1984:35). From this clause most scholars visualize a scene of nomadic life assuming that Abraham was acting in accordance with Near Eastern culture (cf. Von Rad 1972:206; Gunkel 1997:192; Westermann 1985:276). The term "his (Abraham's) tent," which describes the milieu or life style of Abraham, is contrasted with "your servant's house" of Lot, which describes the crowded and noisy urban life style of Lot in Sodom city (cf. Von Rad 1972:217; Hartley 1995:185). These different circumstantial settings between "tent-dwelling" and "house-dwelling" have been considered to be significant among scholars for finding out the author's theological intent (cf. Sailhamer 1976:142; Von Rad 1972:217; Skinner 1980:306; Hamilton 1995:30). The visitors at Abraham's camp were willing to stay with him, but the two men at Lot's house would not accept his invitation showing a negative attitude. This contrast seems to prelude the contrasting incidents and outcomes of the experience of

the two patriarchs in the episodes (cf. von Rad 1972:217; Mathews 1996:216).

The phrase “sitting at the entrance of his tent” also depicts the temporal setting of the scene and it denotes that Abraham was seeking relief (taking a siesta) from the heat of the day after he had finished his morning work (cf. Hartley 1995:177; Bush 1981:282; Speiser 1964:129; Skinner 1980:299; von Rad 1972:206; Wenham 1994:45). Intense heat at noontime compels both laborers and travelers to stop moving to seek shelter, and to rest during the middle of the day (cf. Bush 1981:282). It is the time of the day when people would not normally go out (cf. Sarna 1989:128). Therefore, any sensible man would not visit neighbors to disturb them taking their rest in a tropical weather zone or desert area (cf. Davidson 1979:64). These words therefore depict a calm atmosphere at the initial moments of the scene (cf. Mathews 1996: 217).

Such a time setting in the context of nomadic culture seems to make it difficult for readers to imagine “the unexpected sudden appearance of three men” (cf. Westermann 1985:276). The quiet atmosphere has suddenly changed into a tornado of activity (“hurried,” vv 6-7; “quick,” v 6; “ran,” v 7; cf. Mathews 1996:217) at the next moment by the arrival of the unexpected three visitors. According to the description itself, Abraham did not see them coming (cf. von Rad 1972:206). Therefore, some scholars deduct from such a description a sudden divine appearance (Gn 22:13; Ex 3:2; Jos 5:13; Jdg 6:1-21; Skinner 1988:299; Gunkel 1997:192; von Rad 1972:206; Wenham 1994:46; Mathews 1996:216).

Surely Abraham was surprised at such an unusual and untimely surprise visit and tried to recognize them. The literal translation of Abraham’s watchful observing action suggests his recognition of their identities with a surprised response: “And he lift up his eyes and saw, and was surprised (Lo!)”(hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: ‘wyn"y[e

aF'ÛYIw: ; Gn 18:2a). The audience must pay attention to this spotlight effect focusing on the noontime heat and brightness within the cultural context of nomadic life. It emphasizes the suddenness of the Lord's appearance in this scene.

In the larger narrative context, the audience would notice that four kinds of varied intensity can be distinguished (Gn 18-19). It's from the brightness of noontime (Gn 18:1) to the darkness of evening (Gn 19:1-14), and from the daybreak (Gn 19:15) to the deem-light in the Lot's dwelling cave (Gn 19:30). The bright setting at Abraham's camp is contrasted sharply with the dark setting of Lot (cf. Mathews 1996:213). Such contrasted time settings has been considered significantly as to imply more favor on Abraham but lesser favor on Lot since the early church era (cf. Wenham 1994:54; Oden 2002:73; Mathews 1996:213; Hamilton 1995:30).

### 3.2.4 Summary

The narrative begins with the unexpected arrival of three visitors. Abraham runs hurriedly to welcome them. Lastly Abraham and Sarah prepared an extraordinary meal for them. All most all of the earlier episodes in the Abraham narrative show that the message of the Lord is the primarily concern of his coming as can be seen in historical narrative parallels (Gn 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1; 17:1; Jdg 6 & 13). In the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), however, the episode starts with the offering of food for the messengers (Gn 18:1-8). Hearing out the message comes afterwards in the following event (Gn 18:9-15). Then, what could be the theological significance of presenting the invitation to the table as the beginning of the theophany episode (Gn 18:1-15)?

The linking structure of Genesis 17 and 18 may give readers a clue how to

understand this (see ch.2.1.6). Abraham performed circumcision promptly and obediently in. the preceding episode (Gn 17:23 and 26). A similar sequence of events found in the narrative in Joshua 5:1-15 gives a clue to finding the significance (see ch.2.1.9.1). The most significant feature of both narratives (Gn 17-18 & Jos 5:1-15) is that the divine visitor's appearance happened right after the obedient performing of mass circumcision. Then the appearance of the divine man must be interpreted as God's favorable presence among covenant partners in response to their obedience. While in other parallels (Jdg 6 and 13) a divine being appeared for the first time in their life, but the appearance of the Lord in Genesis 18:1 happened as a consecutive one in the similar thematic context right after Abraham encountered and acquainted His appearance in Genesis 17:1 (see ch.2.1.7). Then one may assume that Abraham recognized such a favorable appearance of the Lord from the initial moment. The significance of offering meals as the first thing may indicate two things.

Firstly it may be understood as the act of worship of Abraham who recognized the divinity of the visitors from the first moment of the theophany. Because there is no description about the covenant partner's terrified response in this episode. The opening phrase signals the Lord's friendly appearance to the one who already has experienced divine encounter many times before (Gn 35:9).

Secondly, the eating of meals may connote the Passover meal typologically. Because the eating of the meal in Genesis 18 happened right after the mass circumcision (Gn 17:23-27), which is the prerequisite requirement for eating the Passover meal (Gn 18:6-8; Ex 12:43-51). And after this the doomed destruction of Sodom and Gomorra happened similar to the doomed smite of the first born in Egypt (Gn 19:11-29; Ex 13:29). The hasty mood of preparing meals in Genesis 18:6-7 looks similar to what

happened in the very night of the Passover meal (cf. Ex 12:11, 20, 39). The bread in Abraham's camp was made without the process of fermentation of dough because of the hurried kneading of three seahs of fine flour (Gn 18:6; cf. Gn 19:3).

The phrase "Near the great trees of Mamre" (Gn 18:1) indicate a religious significance (cf. Gn 2:9; 3:1, 7, 22, 24; 8:11; 9:20). Abraham's life was associated with great trees: Building altars near great trees to the Lord (Gn 12:6-7; 13:18); establishing a new sanctuary by planting a tree (Gn 21:33). The site of Mamre is located in high mountain area (2800 ft high). Abraham's high dwelling places are known as the holy worship place in remembrance of God's appearance (cf. Gn 12:6-8; 13:18; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 22:1-19; 28:17; cf. Jos 20:7). Within the Abraham narrative all places near great trees are depicted as sanctified places dedicated to the Lord (Gn 12:6, 13:18; 18:1; 21:33; cf. Jos 24:26; Is 61:3d). Therefore, readers must take account of such a positive cultic indications of "great trees" found in this opening scene.

The nomadic circumstantial clause "as he was sitting at the entrance to his tent" visualizes a scene of the nomadic life of Abraham. This "tent-dwelling" setting has been compared significantly with the phrase "house-dwelling" setting of Lot for finding the author's theological intent. The phrase "in the heat of the day" depicts temporal setting of the scene. Any sensible man would not visit neighbors to disturb their rest in nomadic culture. Such time indications effectuate the readers to be aware of the unexpected appearance of the three men.

### 3.3 Characterization of Abraham as the Forerunner of the Great Prophets

Abraham, who is the key actor in this episode, is described deferentially by a series of acts (vv 6-7) creating a hurried atmosphere (cf. Hartley 1995:177). By this

description of flurry the author seems to imply that something unexpected had happened (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158). In other parallels divine beings always appear suddenly in surprising ways (Gn 21:17; 22:11-13; Ex 3:2; Jos 5:13; Zech 2:1, 5; 5:1; 6:1; Gunkel 1997:192). There are tension, suspense, and curiosity whether Abraham recognized the deity of visitors or not in this event (Gn 18:1-8). But the fact that visitors appeared suddenly without approaching from the distance seems to indicate that they were heavenly messengers (cf. Hartley 1995:177; Gunkel 1997:192). The guidance of the opening narration (Gn 18:1) and the religious atmosphere created by the setting of holy "great trees" seem to effectuate theological imaginations of the audience.

The depiction of Abraham's action "hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw: (Gn 18:2a, 'and he lifted up his eyes and he saw and Lo!')" is significant to get the picture of Abraham's character. For the pair verb "he lift up his eyes and saw, and Lo!" is used repeatedly as a rhetorical marker in the book of Genesis (Gn 24:63-64; 33:5; 43:29; cf. Jdg 19:17; Knight 2004:160). The pair verb is used for depicting both civil human act of observation on something and watchful prophetic seeing in the book of Genesis (Gn 31:10, 12; cf. Jos 5:13; Zch 1:18; 2:1; cf. Mathews 1996:216). In the prophetic books the pair of verb "looks up and saw, and Lo!" is the tautological expression about the process of prophetic keen "observation and cognition" on the divine appearance (cf. Jr 13:20; Zch 1:18; 2:1; 5:5; Ezk 1:4, 26, 15; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9; cf. Letellier 1995:81: Brownlee 1986:30, 126).

What is significant is that both civil and cultic uses express attentive actions of watching on something that signals an important and imminent event, and they express the nuance of being understood of what people see (cf. Hamilton 1995:6; Mathews 1996:216). Grammatically Hebrew verb Qal of har usually has a sensory perception

meaning, “to see,” or “to look at,” and it denotes “to perceive,” or “to understand” (Gn 1:10, 12; Ex 3:4; 8:11; cf. Sarna 1989:92; Harris et al 1980; Botterweck 1974; van Gemeren 1997:1007).

Therefore, the watching of Abraham must be understood as an attentive act, and never denotes a vague looking (cf. Speiser 1964: 129). The author uses the same technical verb ar>Y:©w: (“and he saw” or “and he perceived”) again in the next sentence (Gn 18:2b, “And *he saw* and ran to meet them from the entrance of the tent”; cf. Knight 2004:160). The repeated imperfect verb ar>Y:©w: (*wayyar*: waw consec, 3 p m of har) apparently functions as a *Leitwort* even within this short opening section of the episode (cf. Venter 2006:9-10 for *Leitwort*). The main use of the imperfect is to express repeated, habitual, or customary actions (cf. Kelley 1992:130). Thus, the author characterizes Abraham’s *accustomed* prudence and his watchful act of recognition by this repetition and imperfect tense of the verb (cf. Calvin 1965:469).

ar'ÛYEw: (*wayyera*), the Nifal imperfect form of the verb har in the opening phrase(“the Lord appeared to him,”) need to be understood in accordance with its grammatic nuance. Nifal expresses a passive or reflexive action, an action the subject performs upon himself (Kelley 1992:109). The Niphal of har *ra-a* with God as subject is one of the three prominent verbs (hlg *gala* in Niphal, [dy *yada* in Niphal) used throughout the Old Testament to describe a person’s encounter with God in revelatory situations (cf. Hamilton 1990:460). It is a technical term for divine self-disclosure, which may be translated into “*The Lord revealed himself visiblely to him as he used to”* (cf. Sarna 1989:92; Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980; Van Gemeren 1997:1007; Sarna 1989:91; Glatzer 1982:39).

Then, the act of the Lord in the Nifal form matches well with the Qal form of the

verb used for Abraham's act (Gn 18:2). The Lord reveals His favoring and visible presence, as indicated by the opening phrase (cf. Gn 12:7; 17:1; Westermann 1985:155, 270; Hamilton 1976:377, 479; Mathews 1996:216, 207) and Abraham perceives the divine presence of the Lord by his prophetic looking and discerning in the mood of joyful surprise. For hNEhiw> ("and behold") depicts the surprised response, which marks superhuman being after the watchful seeing as in Joshua 5:13 (cf. Skinner 1980:299; Hartley 1995:177). Then, one may assert that this is Abraham's immediate recognition of the deity. Sailhamer (1976:144-145,154) asserts that Abraham was able to recognize God's presence at the moment "he lifted up his eyes and he saw" (Gn 18:2a and b).

Abraham was surprised by the Lord's appearance but he was not scared because he already had experienced theophanic events many times throughout his life journey (cf. Youngblood 1991:34-35; Mathews 1996:192-193). He even experienced God's dramatic and vivid going up in previous event ("and God went up from Abraham"; Gn 17:22) like what the parents of Samson did (Jdg 13:20; cf. Wenham 1994:270). The imperfect tense of the Lord's appearing and Abraham's seeing (perceiving; Gn 18:1-2), which denotes reepeated acts, indicates that Abraham is accustomed to recognizing the appearance of the Lord already. Therefore, there is no depiction that Abraham was terrified at the scene as what Manoah was (cf. Block 1999:413; Cundall 1968:159; Boling 1964:219). By this depiction the author seems to imply that Abraham was the most privileged prophet who was granted such a close intimacy with the Lord (cf. Bush 1981:283). It seems that Abraham recognized His coming again bearing the same image and welcomed Him rather gladly. Such characterization of Abraham is not a new feature here. Abraham has been depicted as a

prophet since his first calling (Gn 12:1).

### 3.3.1 Abraham as Prophet in Larger Context

Abraham's initial prophetic experience starts by merely listening to the audible voice of God like Samuel (Gn 12:1; cf. Sm 3:1-21; Sarna 1989:92). The opening phrase "The Lord said to Abraham (Gn 12:1,)" usually describes a prophetic event (cf. Jr 1:7, 12, 14; Ezk 2:1; 3:1; Ac 7:2; Craigie, Kelley & Drinkard 1991:10-17; Brownilee 1986:24-32). In Genesis 15:1, God appears in a vision, which clearly confirms Abraham's credentials as a prophet (Gn 15:1; cf. Jer. 34:12; Sailhamer 1976:127; Hamilton 1972:418; von Rad 1972:183). For the opening formula "the word of the Lord came" is narrated in the same form as in the book of Samuel and Jeremiah (1 Sm 15:10; 2 Sm 7:4; 1 Ki 12:22; Jr 1:2,4,13; 2:1; Hamilton 1976:418; Skinner 1980:278; Westermann 1985:217; Mathews 1996:161; Cooper 1994:60). The Lord appeared by means of a vision and grants Abraham the privilege to speak to him intimately in the same way as the Lord will later appear to Moses (Gn 15:1-8; 17:18; cf. Ex 33:11; Nm 12:8; Dt 34:10; Sailhamer 1976:127). Thus, Abraham is depicted as a greatly privileged prophet. Usually the Lord communicated with the other patriarchs or common prophets by dreams (Gn 20:3; 28:12; 31:10-11, 24; 46:2; Nm 12:6-8; 1 Sm 3:1; Mathews 1996:222). Abraham had a "deep sleep" `hm'ÞDer>t;` (*Tardema)* during his prophetic experience in Genesis 15:12 (cf. Job 4:13; 33:15; cf. Von Rad 1872:187; Hartly 1988:112. Gn 2:21; Harris et all 1980:834; Skinner 1980:281; Botterweck et al 2004). Thus, the larger context of the narrative apparently shows that the intensity of Abraham's prophetic experience progressed gradually (cf. Glatzer 1982:36).

The narrator depicts Abraham as God's prophet in Genesis 18:17 with the word:

"Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" This word of the Lord corresponds with the word of Amos 3:7 ("Surely Yahweh God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets") (cf. Hamilton 1995:17; Sarna 1989:131). Thus, the soliloquy explains Abraham's identity as God's intimate companion or a prophet in discussing God's secret plan (cf. Brueggemann 1982:170; Wolf 1991:108; Sarna 1989:142; Skinner 1980:317; Sailhamer 1976:161). In Genesis 20:7 the Lord himself introduces Abraham to king Abimelech as being a prophet. The Hebrew term `aybiän"` (*navi:* "prophet") denotes a mediator speaking on behalf of God or an authorized spokesman of God (cf. Ex 6:28-30; 7:1,2; Mathews 1996:254; Botterweck et al 1998:133; Sarna 1989:142; Harris et al 1980; Von Rad 1972:228; Westermann 1985:324; Wenham 1994:71). In Genesis 18:22-33, Abraham already demonstrated his role as mediator for Sodom and Gomorrah in the long dialogue with the Lord (cf. Gn 18:22-33; Ex 3; 1 Ki 19:1-18; Sarna 1989:142; Hamilton 1976:64). There is no parallel to Abraham's experience in negotiating with the Lord in Genesis 18:22-33. His negotiation (or prayer) has verbal links with Moses' great intercession in Exodus 32-34 (cf. 1 Sm 12:23; Am 7:9; Jr 14:7-9, 13; 15:1; Wenham 1994:53; Sarna 1989:131). The privileged position of conducting intercession is what makes a man a real prophet (cf. Nm 12:13; 21:7; Dt 9:26; I Sm 12:19-23; Calvin 1965:478; Von Rad 1972:229; Speiser 1964:149; Sarna 1989:131,142). Then, one may assert that Abraham was depicted by the author as a fitting prototype for the great prophet Moses (cf. Mathews 1996:222; Glatzer 1982:29-30).

In some of the psalms the earlier patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) are identified with "anointed ones" and "prophets": "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm" (Ps 105:12-15; cf. Elwell 2000; McCann 1996:1105; Allen 1983:38).

Therefore, I assert that readers must consider such a privileged aspect to interpret every element of the episode in Genesis 18:1-15 (cf. Ross 1988:341; Youngblood 1991:34-35; Keil 75-76; Wenham 1994:222). Buber (1982:39-40) understands Abraham's act of seeing in Genesis 18:2a and b as the sixth prophetic "seeing" of God (Gn 18:1) of the seven appearances of God throughout Abraham's life (cf. Gn 12:1-3, 7; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1; 22:1). Then, readers may understand the hurried actions of Abraham as the due response at his recognition of the deity (cf. Chisolm 2006:29; Knight 2004:171).

### 3.3.2 Abraham's Hurried Actions Indicating Suitable Response to Theophany

Abraham's tornado of activity ("hurried," v 2, 6; "be quick," v 6; "ran," v 2, 6) happened right after his attentive looking up and recognizing the unexpected three visitors (cf. Mathews 1996:217; Brueggemann 1982:158). This type of action creates tension in the mind of an audience trying to understand the implication of this sudden change of atmosphere (cf. Venter 2006:6). Westermann (1985:277) remarks that the haste of these actions is contrasted deliberately with the quiet beginning at the start. Many scholars interpret Abraham's hurried actions as showing an extraordinary kindness for strangers without knowing their divinity (cf. Heb 13:2; Jarick 2000:84; Hamilton 1995:9-11; Mathews 1996:217; Dillmann 1897:93). They interpret Abraham's manners as the self-depreciating courtesy of the Orient person, or the customary hospitable civil manner shown toward strangers (cf. Simpson 1978:617; Oden 2002:64; Sarna 1989:129; Excell 1900:1-6; Ross 1988:341; Jarick 2000:84; Maher 1982:113).

On the other hand, some scholars assert that such description indicates Abraham's recognition of the visitor's higher position than himself (cf. Gunkel 1997:193; Speiser 1964:129; Skinner 1980:299; Sarna 1989:129; Von Rad 1972:206;

Wenham 1994:46; Hartley 1995:178). They consider such hurried actions as the proper response after having recognized the real identity of the visitors (cf. Calvin 1965:469-470; Sailhamer 1976:144-146). Actions taken by people correspond to their norm of hospitality. According to *the gradations of Persian etiquette*, Abraham welcomed visitors as *very superior ones* (cf. Bush 1981:283). Abraham who was a chief of a nomadic band of over 318 trained men (shepherds; Gen 14:14) was acting like a servant who welcomes the highest ones or people being of superior rank (cf. Bush 1982:283; Skinner 1980:300; Jamison et al 1990:28). It is an extraordinary manner, which does not fit his status. Therefore, the view that Abraham noticed visitors as men of nobility or as divine beings seems to be proper (cf. 1 Sm 24:8; 25:23-24; 2 Sm 14:4; Hartleley 1995:178; Botterweck et al 1974).

The understanding of this episode should be guided by the opening remark "the Lord appeared to," which denotes in a vivid way God's appearance (cf. Gn 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; cf. Mathews 1996:216). The function of the repeated technical prophetic verb *wayyar* (ar>Y:©w:) effectuates a series of rapid actions in imperfect tense with the *waw*-consecutive, which indicates Abraham's habitual manner toward the Lord (cf. see the depiction of Abraham's act of worship in imperfect form; Gn 12:7; 13:18; 17:3, 17, Letellier 1995:82). In another passage the same consecutive verb (Gn 18:2b) "And he saw and ran to meet them and bowed low to the ground" is used for friendly and close relatives (Gn 29:13; 33:4). At this stage of his life, Abraham was already acquainted with encountering the friendly presence of the Lord even in the visible (or vivid) manner under the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" (Gn 17:1). Then, one may assert that Abraham's recognition of the deity caused his hurried tempo in this scene rather than self-depreciatory or hospitable civil courtesy (cf. Skinner 1980:300;

Wenham 1994:46; Sarna 1989:128).

#### 3.3.2.1 Cultic Nuance of Abraham's Bow Down to the Ground

Many scholars understood Abraham's bowing down as a token of self-depreciating civil respect or as a warm welcome, thus, they characterize Abraham as a man of being humble and hospitable (Gn 18:2e; cf. Gn 23:7, 12; Simpson 1978:617; Jarick 2000:84; Sarna 1989:129; Hartley 1995:178; Bush 1981:283). But according to civil custom in the ancient Near East, bowing down was not the way of daily greeting for each other. The way of everyday greeting among common citizen in the ancient Near East was the effusion of natural emotions: hugging, kissing and embracing upon meeting saying "shalom" (cf. Gn 27:26; 33:4; 45:14; 46:29; Ex 4:27; 1Sm 10:1; 2 Sm 8:10; 11:7; Lk 7:37; Rm 16:16; Tenney 1975). Bowing down to the ground is never done for unknown strangers (cf. Westermann 1985:277-278). Sarna (1989:129) asserts that culturally people only bow down to the ground when they meet a man of higher dignity as a gesture of honor and respect in the ancient Near East (cf. Gn 23:7, 12; 33:3; 37:7; 42:6). Jacob acknowledges Esau's lordship by bowing down to the ground as a gesture of honor and reconciliation (cf. Wenham 1994:298; Gn 33:1-15; cf. Gibson 1982:209; Simpson 1978:729-730). Thus, it is done only for special ones on special occasions in the ancient Near East.

Gunkel (1997:193) explains that Abraham bowed deeply before strangers as though they were princes (cf. 2 Sm 9:6; 14:4; 1Ki 1:47). Westermann (1985:277-278) asserts that Abraham's prostration shows that the three strangers are treated as people of higher rank. The use of the verb hxv in the ancient Near East and West Semitic is "to prostrate oneself" before a monarch or superior as a paying homage or as the way of

worship to other gods (cf. Is 2:20; 44:15: 46:6; Brown 1979). In the ancient Near East, the king was believed to be a son of god or the incarnated god himself. Pharoah king of Egypt was believed to be the incarnation of Amun-Ra, the sun god (cf. Ellison 1973:58; Arnold 2002:76).

A certain Canaan king named Danel was described as "the man of god of Harnam" in the Ugaritic narrative, the "Tale of Aqhat" (cf. Arnold 2002:82). An ancient Canaan king Kirta also was described as both "the lad of El" and "El's son" interchangeably (cf. Arnold: 2002:88-95). Both living and dead emperors, high officials, and Heroes in Greco-Roman world were regarded as gods, and they were the objects of offering sacrifices to and of worship, namely, as object of bowing down to the ground (cf. Dn 6:7; 1 Sm 28:1-14; Von Stuckrad 2006; Harris 1980; Tenney 1975; Drioton 1959:44-57, 87; Barclay 1975:102; Hus 1962:99-104). Such an animistic world-view has been popular throughout the world from ancient times down to today (cf. Dyrness 1990:35-70; Grunlan & Mayers 1988:226; Von Stuckrad 2006).

If the nuance of "bowing down to the ground" had such a serious and weighty cultural meaning, then, Abraham's bowing down to the ground in Genesis 18:2 must not be understood as a daily custom or his humble and warm manner for unknown ordinary strangers. If the visitors were ordinary travelers, when Abraham greeted them by bowing down to the ground, *they also should have bowed down to the ground together.* This is the custom in the East. But there is no depiction of such actions by the visitors. Instead they gave an authoritative word of grant in response to the courteous word of Abraham's invitation. Such a manner of visitors shows that they were divine beings that were much higher than Abraham.

What should be noted attentively here is that Abraham bowed low to the ground

at the first moment of encounter with the visitors (Gn 18:2). This is one of the unique features of this episode. In Samson's story the bowing down of Manoah and his wife was done only after the recognition of the deity of their visitor at the last moment of encounter (cf. Jdg 13:20; Block 1999:415). Joshua bowed down to the ground after he recognized the divine identity of a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword (Jos 5:14). So did Balaam to "the angel of the Lord" as he recognized the divine identity (Nm 22:31).

Thus, the act of Abraham's bowing down indicates an act of worship before God after his prophetic recognition "looked up his eyes and perceived, and Lo!" (Gn 18:2; Ch 7:3; Ex 24:26; Ex 20:5). Further explanation on this action in the larger context will advance a proper understanding of it.

#### 3.3.2.2 Abraham's Bowing down to the Ground in the Larger Context

In the text of Genesis 17:3 and 7, Abraham's bowing down to the ground was an expression of "Amen" to the promise of God as well as his reverential owe and fear at the theophany (cf. Mathews 1996:201, 205; Roop 1987:122, 124; Westermann 1985:260). Readers need to notice that the same action was done in the previous narrative where it started with the same opening phrase "The Lord appeared to" (Gn 17:1; 18:1), which describes a person's encounter with God in revelatory situations (cf. Hamilton 1976:460). Then, Abraham's act of falling facedown down was the act of worship in Genesis 17:3 and 7. Such cultic reaction in the presence of the Lord is recorded only of Abraham and his servant (Gn 24:52; Mathews 1996:201).

In the text of Genesis 23:7 and 12, Abraham's bowing down to the ground was not the daily way of greetings. For, it shows the formula of ancient Near East's

customary bargaining between two princely ones (cf, Simpson 1978:647; Gibson 1982:117-118; Westermann 1985:372-373). Abraham and the Hittites exchange princely respects for each other: the Hittites call Abraham WnkeêAtB. 'hT'a; ~yhiÛl{a/ ayfi'n> ynI©doa} (My lord! You are a prince of *Elohim* among us), and Abraham responded to such a royal welcome by also bowing down to the ground before the people, which is the manner of paying royal respect for Hittites (cf. Hamilton 1976:129).

"The Hittites" in Genesis 23 refer to those "who had come to the gate of his city" (v 10). The phrase, "the Hittites," is the idiomatic expression for a group that has a voice in community affairs, that is, the highest city authorities, namely the city fathers who are in charge of law court (cf. Hamilton 1976:134; Speiser 1956:20-23; Westermann 1985:300-301; Wenham 1994:126-127). In the Old Testament "Judges" (*shofetim*) in a city are even occasionally called "*Elohim*" (Ex 21:6; 22:7; Ps 82:1, 6; Jn 10:34; Tenney 1975). Therefore, Abraham's bowing down to the ground was to show reverential honor and deep gratitude as he hears the word of permission from the Hittites for the choicest tombs (cf. Sarna 1989:158; Harris et al 1980; Hamilton 1976:134; Westermann 1985:374). Abraham paid a high honor to Ephron, who was supposedly a man of nobility and the landowner of Hebron. For, the Bible rarely records the father's name in the case of a non-Israelite (cf. Hamilton 1976:134; Sarna 1989:158). Therefore, Abraham's act of bowing down to the ground in Genesis 18:2 must not be understood as the daily way of greetings to unknown ordinary visitors. Abraham's courteous word of invitation attests this assertion.

### 3.3.3 Is Abraham Characterized as Someone Recognizing the Divinity of his Visitors by Using the Courteous Words of Invitation He Used?

Abraham invites the visitors with the most courteous word of invitation (Gn 18:3a, “If I have found favor in your eyes”). This phrase is used many times within Genesis (cf. Gn 19:19; 30:27; 32:5; 33:8, 10, 15; 34:11; 39:4; 47:25, 29; 50:4; Clark 1971:261-280; Westermann 1985:278). In most cases, the phrase is a formal expression used by a subordinate when he makes a request to someone higher or a royal person (cf. Gn 33:8, 10, 15; 1 Sm 27:5). It is also used when a religious believer asks God or a divine being for a special favor (cf. Ex 33:13; 34:9; Jdg 6:17; Westermann 1985:278; Wenham 1987:145; Mathews 1996:217). Our main concern here is to decide whether the expression is used here for higher one or for God. If one may prove that the phrase in this episode was used for God, it can be understood as an indication that Abraham immediately recognized the deity.

Different contexts indicate different uses of the phrase. The juxtaposed episode about Lot in the narrative complex of Genesis 18 and 19 should be considered as the nearest context about the use of the phrase. Abraham uses the phrase at the initial moment of invitation (Gn 18:3a) while Lot used the same phrase in his petition to the Lord at the last moment of fleeing from the city (Gn 19:19b). Although Lot invited the two visitors out of respect at the initial moment he saw the visitors, but he did not use the most courteous words of invitation. Instead, he seems to use the lesser courteous word “Please turn aside to your servant house” (Gn 19:2a). What is significant is that Lot used the most courteous phrase toward the visitors *after the recognition of their divinity* at final moment of the episode (cf. Gn 19:18-20; Wenham 1994:58; Calvin 1965:510; Westermann 1985:304; Hamilton 1995:43). Gideon used the same phrase *as soon a he began to recognize of the divinity* of his visitor (Jdg 6:17). His offering of a huge amount of sacrifices (*minha*, twenty-two liters of flour) to the angel of the Lord

attests that he identified the divinity of the visitor (cf. Block 1999:262-263).

In Abraham's episode, the repeated depiction of Abraham's prophetic seeing by the Qal form of `har` ("to look at" and "to perceive") precedes the most courteous word of invitation towards the visitors (Gn 18:2a and b; cf. Sarna 1989:91-92; Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980; Botterweck 1974; Speiser 1964:129; Knight 2004:160; Calvin 1965:469). Then, one may assert that Abraham's addressing "If I have found favor in your eyes" was done towards divine beings after his recognition of their divinity as in the cases of Lot and Gideon (cf. Sailhamer 1976:144-145, 154).

In Moses' case, the phrase was used in his prayer when he requested the presence of God as was done in Lot's case (cf. Ex 33:12, 13, 16; Wenham 1987:145; Durham 1987:446-447; Simpson 1978:1076). When the Lord was unwilling to come along with the Israelites because the people were stiff-necked (cf. Ex 33:13-14), the Lord had granted His presence to Moses as the answer to his pleading as in Abraham's case (Ex 33:14). In this episode Abraham also is depicted as the one who received the privilege to stand before God's presence like Moses. This aspect must be considered significantly in understanding the characterization of Abraham. Therefore, the view that the most courteous word of invitation is only for ordinary weary travelers does not fit to the overall literary context. Abraham rather asks the favor of God's presence than just speaking to ordinary travelers in this episode (cf. Gn 39:4; Wenham 1987:145; Sailhamer 1976:144).

The visitors' authoritative way in which they replied the word of grant (Gn 18:5, "Do as you say") attests that the visitors were not ordinary humble travelers.

#### 3.3.3.1 The Succinct Answer toward Abraham's Courteous and Long Address of

**Invitation**

The brief, almost condescending answer contrasts noticeably with the wordy or verbose invitation of Abraham (cf. Von Rad 1972:206). In ancient tales the greater person is always succinct in his answer to utter the words of grant to the lesser one: "Do as you say!" (Gn 18:5), against the lesser person who is inclined to garrulousness (cf. Obadiah with Elijah: I Kings 18:7-15; Gn 18:5; Simpson 1978:618). David's brief response is contrasted in a similar way with the women's expansive speeches in 1 Samuel 25:24ff; 2 Sm 14:5ff; cf. Gunkel 1997:195). From this depiction the author seems to express that visitors are higher ones than Abraham.

The willing and prompt word of authoritative grant can be compared with the two angels' refusal and hesitancy in answer to the Lot's courteous invitation in Genesis 19:1-3 (cf. Oden 2002:63; Calvin 1965:495; Sailhamer 1976:144-146). The word aL{ê (*lo*) in that case connotes "no," or "certainly not" and it underlines their strong rejection of Lot's offer (cf. Letellier 1995:142). Readers may feel that the angels are unwilling and creating an unpleasant atmosphere from this strong rejection in the opening part of the Lot's episode (cf. Gn 19; Hamilton 1995:32; Calvin 1965:495; Speiser 1964:138).

Whereas, readers may find God's well-wishing purpose of visiting to Abraham's camp from the fact that the visitors granted Abraham his presence without hesitation (Gn 18:5). Considering the preceding event of Abraham's executing immediate circumcision, the prompt word of divine grant seems to express God's willing and pleasant staying in Abraham's camp (cf. Hartley 1995:175; Knight 2004:171; Sailhamer 1976:142-143; Von Rad 1972:203; Mathews 1996:207). Thus, the semantic meaning of the phrase and its contextual use depicts that Abraham was favored by the visit of higher ones or divine ones (Gn 18:3a). From these facts one may assert that the author depicts

Abraham even as the privileged one who discerns the divinity of visitors. Abraham's address towards his visitors "My Lord" may possibly indicate their divinity (Gn 18:3).

**3.3.3.2 "My Lord" versus "My lord"**

Many scholars assert that the addressing of *adonai* must be interpreted as "my lord" (sir) rather than "my Lord." They understand it as Abraham's self-depreciatory courtesy towards fellow human beings, which is characteristic of Eastern manners (cf. Driver 1904:192; Speiser 1964:129; Von Rad 1972:206; Skinner 1980:299-300; Wenham 1994:206). In other words, Abraham is understood as one who is characterized as the one who is very humble. Such a view, however, is based on the assumption that Abraham invited them without knowing their identity. It needs to be interpreted in accordance with the literary context as well as the grammatical meaning of the word rather than the theological assumption.

What matters here also is to decide whether the addressing of *adoanai* is used *for* addressing the divinity or towards human beings. The arrangement of associated words with *adonai* needs to be considered as well. The associated singular personal used together with the vocative title of "*adonai"* may indicate that the addressing is towards a single one ("If I have found favor in *your* eyes, my Lord, do not pass *your* servant by"). They are written not in the plural you *(kem)* but in *the singular you* (*ka*) `yn<ëy[eB`, in the eyes of you and `^D<]b.[;`, servant of you (Gn 18:3a; cf. 2 Ki 18:27; Is 36:12; Hamori 2004:35). Then, grammatically the vocative title "*adonai"* needs to be translated as the addressing towards a prominent singular one among the three (cf. Mathews 1996:216). In the following part of the narrative, as the Lord speaks about Sarah's giving birth, the Lord is depicted as a singular "he" ("then he said" `rm,aYO©w:` ; Gn 18:10-13). The men who departed to Sodom are identified with two

angels (Gn 18:22; 19:1; cf. Wenham 1994:51, 54; Hamori 2004:42).

Scholars are interested in understanding why it is written in the singular "you," while three men are visiting (cf. Oden 2002:63-64; Hamilton 1995:6-7). Many scholars assume that Abraham called the singular form of "you" to one of the three men who had the most dignified and commanding air or who perhaps stood out from the rest (cf. Speiser 1964:129; Hamilton 1995:6; Wenham 1994:46; Sailhamer 1976:144; Mathews 1996:216-217; Hamori 2004:36; Bush 1981:283; Keil 1996:146; Speiser 1964:129). Ross (1988:342) asserts that Abraham recognized that they were worthy to be treated honorably. Sarna (1989:128) asserts, "The present vocalization serves as an indication to the reader that the three 'men' are no ordinary wayfarers."

Thus, Abraham calling "my Lord" shows that Abraham took these visitors to be nobility in the perspective of social status (cf. Hartley 1995:178). Then, one may assert that the vocative title "*adonai*" depicts Abraham's awareness and prudence to decide upon a proper manner, which fits the social status of visitors rather than his self-depreciatory courtesy without discrimination of their social status.

In the previous section I have attested that there are many indications to support the view of Abraham's earlier recognition of the divinity of his visitors. To decide whether we should interpret the word *adonai* as "my Lord" or "my lord"(sir) seems to depend on the decision whether we take the view of earlier recognition or of later recognition of the divinity of the visitors (cf. Shailhamer 1976:144). Abraham's prophetic "seeing" depicted with the word `hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw:` ("he saw or perceived and behold!") in Genesis 18:2 seems to have effectuated him to call one of them as "My Lord" rather than "my lord" (cf. Gn 19:2).

I assert that this literary context must be considered for deciding the proper

nuance of *adona*i. The Masoretes considered Abraham's speech as an address to God and vocalized *adonay*, "Lord" (cf. Von Rad 1972:206; Driver 1904:192; Skinner 1980:299). Abraham used to call God "My Lord" in his earlier theophanic encounters (Gn 12:8; 13:4; 15:2, 8). Then, Abraham's calling "My Lord" may be understood as the depiction of his spiritual awareness rather than his civil manner of self-depreciatory courtesy.

### 3.3.4 Abraham's Standing at the Table Meal Characterizes His Attitude Towards God

Abraham's behavior when he served the meal while standing before them is also of concern here (Gn 18:8c, "He stood near them as they ate under the tree"). Early church fathers such as Ambrose, Augustine (Oden 2002:62-64), an reformist Calvin (1992:468), and some modern scholars (cf. Hamilton 1995:9; Simpson 1978:616-617; Ross 1988:338; Gunkel 1997:193; Brueggemann 1997:166; Exell 1900:5) understand the nuance of Abraham's respectful waiting upon them in a standing position while they were eating as expression of Abraham's humble civil attitude.

In other parallels where the occasion is described of serving a meal at welcome-table (or fellowship meals) for visitors, there is not any description of the host "standing" (attending) for the guests while they are eating (Gn 19:3; 24:33-54; 26:30; 31:54). Only in this episode (Gn 18:8) the term "standing" is used for Abraham waiting upon his guests while they were eating. According to the Near Eastern culture, the chief of a tribe never acts as waiter standing on his feet for the ordinary visitors (cf. Gn 14:14; cf. Bush 1981:289). It is an un-proper and unthinkable manner for the chief of a tribe to attend to visitors when they were eating (e.g., gradations of Persian etiquette; cf. Bush

1981:283; Hartley 1995:178; Skinner 1980:299).

I assert that this action should not be understood as an act of common civil courtesy but as something quite unusual. Then, why did the chief himself have to wait upon his visitors while they were eating (cf. Jamieson et al 1990:29)? Our viewpoint needs to be rather focused on the social status of the visitors and their identity than on Abraham being so humble and acting in such a hospitable manner here. Skinner (1980:299) describes the connotation of Abraham's standing from a social status perspective as follows: "If they are persons of high rank he also stands by them while they eat." Hartley (1995:178) also asserts, "That he did not eat with the guests further indicates that Abraham considered them superior to himself."

The verb dm[ (*amad*) is commonly used for depicting servant's standing before someone higher (master or ruler) in authority in the ancient Near East (cf. Gn 43:15; Ex 9:10; Nm 27:2,21; Botterweck et al 1974). The verb can be translated as "to minister" to the Lord by doing "priestly service" (cf. Dt 10:8; 1 Sm 16:21; Jr 40:10; 52:12; 1 Ki 8:11; Neh.12.44; Ezk 44:15; cf. Bush 1981:288-289; Botterweck et al 1974). The phrase of "to stand before Yahweh" (Dt 4:10; Jr 15:1) can also denotes a posture of prayer or doing intercession, and a posture of listening to the word of the Lord (Dt 4:10; 19:17; Jr 7:10; cf. Harris 1980; Brown 1979).

The proper nuance of *standing* in this narrative needs to be considered according to its nearest literary context. The same verb dm[ (*amad*) is used *two more times significantly* in the following narrative units to denote the posture of praying in front of the presence of the Lord (Gn 18:22; 19:27; cf. Harris 1980). These literary nuances are the nearest contexts for this expression. Therefore, I conclude that in the mind of the author "standing" is a constant fixed concept for Abraham who stands at the presence of

the Lord. This is why the author mentions that Abraham stands even near the three men because it is the Lord being present at the meal. “Standing” here must imply a cultic nuance rather than being a mere civil manner of acting (cf. Bush 1981:289). Abraham is characterized here as a god-fearing man rather than just someone being humble and courteous one.

### 3.3.5 Summary

The depiction of Abraham’s action with the words `hNEhiw arY:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'YIw:` (Gn 18:2a, “And he lifted up his eyes and he saw and Lo!”) must be understood as depicting watchful prophetic seeing in the book of Genesis (Gn 31:10, 12; cf. Jos 5:13; Zch 1:18; 2:1). In the prophetic books the phrase is used as a tautological expression for the process of prophetic keen “observation and recognition” of the Lord’s appearance (cf. Ezk 1:26; 8:2; Jr 13:20; Zch 1:18; 2:1; 5:5; Ezk 1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9). Grammatically the Qal form of the verb `har` usually has a sensory perception meaning, “to see,” or “to look at,” and it denotes metaphorical meaning, “to perceive,” or “to understand” (Gn 1:10, 12; Ex 3:4; 8:11).

The author uses the same technical verb `arY:©w:` (“and he saw” or “and he perceived” in the imperfect tense) again in the next sentence (Gn 18:2b). Apparently it functions as a *Leitwort*, which characterizes Abraham’s prudence and his accustomed watchful act of recognition by this repetition. Then, Abraham’s actions depict Abraham’s unique character as a prophet in this narrative.

Abraham, who is the chief of a nomadic band, is acting here like a servant who welcomes the highest one as person of superior rank. Therefore, his act of hurrying indicates the visitor’s superior position to Abraham. The action also indicates a

surprised response after his prophetic recognition of their deity. The common use of the verb string (Gn 18:2b) “And he saw and ran to meet them and bowed low to the ground” is used in other passages for friends and close relatives (Gn 29:13; 33:4). Abraham experienced the appearance of the Lord in the previous event indicated by both the imperfect tense of the verbs, which indicates repeated and habitual acts and the same opening phrase “the Lord appeared to” (Gn 12:7; 17:1). Abraham, who is already acquainted with His kindly presence, ran to meet Him gladly.

According to civil custom in ancient Near East, bowing down was not the way of the daily greeting of each other. Culturally people only bow down to the ground to someone of higher dignity or to gods as an act of worship (cf. Gn 23:7, 12; 33:3; 37:7; 42:6; Is 2:20; 44:15: 46:6). If the visitors were ordinary human beings, they should have bowed down to the ground at the same time when Abraham bowed down to them. This is the custom in the East. But here they did not. It shows that they were superior to Abraham or that they were divine beings.

Abraham bowed low to the ground at the first moment of encountering the visitors (Gn 18:2). In other parallels the bowing down is done only after recognizing the divinity of the visitor (cf. Nm 22:31; Jdg 13:20; Jos 5:14). Thus, the act of Abraham’s bowing down indicates an act of worship before God following his prophetic recognition depicted in the words “looked up his eyes and perceived, and Lo!” (Gn 18:2; Ch 7:3; Ex 24:26; Ex 20:5).

Abraham invites the visitors with the most courteous word of invitation (Gn 18:3a, “If I have found favor in your eyes”). The phrase is a formal expression of a subordinate making a request to a superior or kingly one (cf. Gn 33:8,10,15; 1 Sm 27:5), and it is also used when a religious person asks God (cf. Ex 33:13; 34:9; Jdg 6:17). The

phrase as used in the nearest literary context indicates prayer *after recognition of the divinity* of the visitors (cf. Gn 19:18-20; Ex 33:12-16; Jdg 6:17).

In ancient tales the greater person is always succinct in utterance an authoritative word of grant to the lesser one: “So do as thou has said!” (Gn 18:5; 1 Ki 18:7-15; 1 Sm 25:24ff; 2 Sm 14:5ff). Considering the context of Abraham’s executing circumcision in the previous event, such an utterance may be interpreted as a willing divine grant for the obedient.

To decide whether we interpret the word *adonai* as “my Lord” or “my lord” (Sir) depends on the time of recognition of the divinity of the visitors as well as Abraham’s awareness of the social status of his visitors. Abraham’s earlier prophetic “seeing” depicted with the word `hNEhiw arY:ëw:` in Genesis 18:2 effectuates him to call one of them as “My Lord” rather than “my lord” (cf. Gn 19:2). Thus, Abraham calling “My Lord” depicts Abraham’s spiritual awareness rather than his manner of self-depreciatory courtesy.

Abraham’s standing at the meals characterizes his faithful attitude. In other parallels dealing with entertaining guest at a meal, there is no indication of “standing” while the guests are eating (Gn 19:3; 24:33-54; 26:30; 31:54). Abraham’s standing here is not for ordinary visitors according to the Eastern culture (e.g., gradations of Persian etiquette). The fact that Abraham did not eat together with the guests indicates that Abraham considered them superior to himself. The same verb `dm[` (*amad*) is used *two more times significantly* within this narrative to denote the posture of praying in the presence of the Lord (Gn 18:22; 19:27). Therefore, Abraham’s standing must imply cultic nuance rather than an indication of civil manners.

### 3.4 The Motif of Abraham's Preparation of an Extraordinary Meal (Gn 18:6-8)

Many scholars, who see a test motif in the visit of God, assert that Abraham's preparing of the meal is an expression of the generous and warm welcome found among the customs of ancient nomadic tribes (cf. Dillmann 1897:92-93; Gunkel 1997:195; Skinner 1980:300; Hamilton 1995:8; Wenham 1994:46). But I find that there are many evidences to attest that the food prepared for the visitors rather bears a cultic nuance than the ordinary serving of food for strangers. The main concern here is to find out what the underlying motif is of preparing such a generous meal. I presume that the motive for Abraham for preparing such an extraordinary table attests to the cultic view of his action. The quality and the quantity of food that Abraham prepared imply the motif of the social status of the visitors (cf. Bush 1981:283, 286-287). What would the narrator try to intend by such descriptions? I expect the probable answer to the question would be found through inter-textual comparison with parallels in the book of Judges (6 and 13). The result of this comparison should also be related to Abraham's response to the theophany he experienced. The symbolic implications for the food prepared in the first scene (Gn 18:1-8) need to be dealt with thoroughly to understand the author's theological intent with this narrative.

#### 3.4.1 Different Motives for Preparing Meals as Indicated by Inter-textual Study

The motif for preparing food for visitors is usually related to the spiritual experience of covenant partnership in parallel narratives (Jdg 6 & 13). Comparing the sequential plot of some of these narratives helps one to understand the different motives for preparing meals for divine visitors. The Abraham Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) shows a different sequential plot than other similar theophany parallels where the deity appears

in anthropomorphic form (cf. Jdg 6 and 13). Compare the following:

The theophany to Abraham (Gn 18:1-15)

i. Gn 18:1, The Lord appeared to Abraham in human form;
ii. Gn 18:2-5, Abraham invites the Lord to his extraordinary meal initializing the events following;
iii. Gn 18:6-8 The Lord accepts the invitation to the meal by eating;
iv. Gn 18:9-15, Abraham received the message of reconfirmation after the meal showing no terrified response

The theophany to Gideon (Jdg 6:11-24)

A. Jdg 6:11, The angel of the Lord came to Gideon in human form;
B. Jdg 6:12-16, The angel of the Lord first delivered the message to Gideon;
C. Jdg 6:17, Gideon then presented sacrificial offering to authenticate the identity of visitor offering sacrificial food (*minha*);
D. Jdg 6:18-21, The angel of the Lord accepted the food and changes it into a burnt offering;
E. Jdg 6:22, Gideon recognized the divinity of his visitor and was afraid to die as result of theophany

The theophany to Samson's parents (Jdg 13:3-25)

A. Jdg 13:3a, The angel of the Lord appeared to the wife of Manoah;
B. Jdg 13b-14 The angel of the Lord first delivered the message to the

wife of Manoah and she went to her husband;

C. Jdg 13:15-16, *Manoah then invited the messenger to a meal;*

D. Jdg 13:17-22, The angel of the Lord rejected the invitation to the meal and request them to make a burnt offering for the Lord. The angel ascended in the flames of the sacrifice and Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground afraid that they would die;

F. Jdg 13:23, The woman made her husband to calm down assuring him that the Lord had no intention to let them die.

In the Gideon (Jdg 6:11-24) and Samson narratives (Jdg 13:3-25) the recognition of the deity occurs at the last moment of the events. But in the Abraham narrative the recognition of the deity occurs during the first moments of the theophany. The difference is found in the motive of preparing food. Gideon asks for a sign to authenticate the genuineness of the promise of God by preparing a huge `hx'n>mi` (*minha*; the word is mostly used as indication of "offering" to the Lord; Jdg 6:18) even though he is inquisitive (Jdg 6:13-14, 17, 36-40).

In the Gideon's narrative the angel of the Lord burnt the offered food (*minha*; Jdg 6:18, 21). *Minha* constitutes here a part of the ritual creating fragrance by burning it to the Lord (Gn 8:2). By using this description, the author seems to denote Gideon's partial recognition of the deity (Jdg 6:13-14, 17, 36-40; cf. Block 1999:262-163, 272-273; Cundall 1968:105). Thus, the theological use of the term *minha* refers to "sacrifice," or "offering," as performed in many cultic parallels (Ex 30:9; Lv 7:37; 9:4; 23:13,18,37; Nu 4:16; 6:15; 7:87; 15:24; 29:39; 2 Ki 8:8; Gn 43:11,15,25,26; Jdg 6:18; Botterweck et al 1974; Elwell 2000).

On the other hand, in the Samson birth narrative, the food that Manoah prepared for the visitor to eat is called ~x,l, (*lehem;* Jdg 13:16). The Semitic root of *lehem* means merely "primary food." The general use of the word denotes human food. It can be translated as "meals," "bread," "food," (cf. Ex 25:39; Botterweck et al 1974). Thus, Manoah's motif for preparing food here was the civil way of welcoming a human visitor (Jdg 13:16; cf. Moore 1989:222; Morris 1968:158-159; Block 1999:412). The author narrates the reason: "Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the Lord" (Jdg13:16). For this reason, the author describes Manoah's remarkably slow discernment (cf. Block 1999:413; Cundall 1968:159; Boling 1975:218). For, he does not recognize divinity of the visitor until the last moment when something amazing happened when the angel ascended in the flames (Jdg 13:19-21; cf. Boling 1964:219). Thus, different motives for preparing a meal are expressed by using different names for the foods prepared.

In turn the different names (*lehem or minha*) used for the prepared meals imply different levels of spiritual awareness in the covenant partners. In these theophany narratives it is related to the specific motive for preparing the meal (Jdg 6 & 13). These different aspects may help us to understand Abraham's motive for preparing a meal linked to his spiritual sense recognizing the divinity of his visitors. In the Abraham narrative (Gn 18:1-15), Abraham seemed to recognize the Lord at the first encounter, so he bowed reverently down to the ground and invited them to the extraordinary meal even before he heard the message of the Lord. Abraham did not show any terrified response to the theophany. Therefore, I assert that the motive of Abraham's preparing the meal had a cultic reason. I expect that analyzing the quality and quantity of the meal including its symbolic meaning will attest my assertion still further.

### 3.4.2 Cultic Implication of the Three Seahs of Fine Flour (Gn 18:6)

Scholars are concerned with the amount and the quality of "the three Seahs of fine flour." Westermann (1985:279) finds here a unique but awkward combination of the two Hebrew nouns tl,soê xm;q<å (*solet kemah*): *Kemah* means ordinary inferior kind of flour so that it denotes the common people's flour (cf. Is 47:2; I Ki 17:12; cf. Harris, Archer & Waltke 1980). And *solet* means finely ground flour, which is expensive and considered a luxury item used especially for entertaining important guests (cf. Ezk 16:13; Harris et al 1980). According to 1 Kings 5:2 (4:22 in NIV) *kamah* and *solet* were distinguished as being two different types of grain. Then, one may guess that the combination may denote two different kinds of flour. Whereas, Gunkel (1997:195) asserts: "The earlier period knows only *kemah*, even for sacrifice (Jdg 6:19; 1 Sm 1:24). The later period employs *solet* for sacrifice. Here *solet* is a later correction of *kemah* . . . LXX and Vulgate translate only *solet*." Why had the LXX and the Vulgate translators taken only *solet*? It may indicate that ancient scholars decided that *solet* was the specific word that the narrator used to indicate a cultic nuance for the three seahs of flour.

The Hebrew noun tAg*[u (*ugot*: round unleavened baked bread or cake upon hot stone; Gn 18:6) was translated by the LXX scholars as evgkrufi,aj (*enkryphia)* that indicates "secret or hidden things (bread)," derived from evg&kru²fia,zw ( to keep oneself hidden, act underhand; cf. Brown 1979; Bauer 1958; Keil 1996:228). The LXX scholars did not use another Greek noun a;rtoj (bread, loaf of bread), but rather evgkrufi,aj (baked cake or secret or hidden bread). The LXX scholars seemed to try to give some mythic or cultic nuances to the food in

relationship with the Lord by their translation. As result of the LXX translation, the early church fathers Ambrose, Origen, and Jerom attempted to find various cultic implications (e.g., “incarnation of Jesus” or “Trinity”) for the word (cf. Oden 2002:65; Hayward 1995:167-168).

A recent Hebrew scholar, Sarna (1989:129) also accentuates this nuance of *solet*, “fine flour”: “Abraham specifies the use of ‘choice flour,’ … the type from which meal offerings were later brought to the sanctuary.” In the Pentateuch only *solet* “best wheat flour” is used in cereal offerings and for making the showbread in the temple of God (cf. Lv 24:5; Wenham 1994:47).

I think that the view of the LXX and the Vulgate is relevant in this context. The symbolic and cultic meaning, as well as the notion of utmost sincerity, seems to be implied skillfully in this description by the narrator. A *seah* was a third of an *ephah*, or approximately thirteen liters (cf. Speiser 1964:130). Then, the total amount becomes around 39 liters. It is a majestic and a very abundant meal (cf. Gunkel 1997:195).

Simpson (1978:618) asserts that the reference to the use of three *seahs* for the meal does not only indicate Abraham’s extravagant generosity but is also a subtle suggestion to the hearers that the visitors were divine beings. Such an unusually large amount of flour may imply the liberality of the host towards the highest one or towards the deity (cf. Jamison et al 1997:155). Gideon prepared a big amount of *minha* (a young goat and an *ephah* of flour for the angel of the Lord (about 22 liters; Jdg 6:18-19). Then, Abraham’s superfluous amount of food may denote a `hx'n>mi` (*minha*, offering) rather than a `~x,l,` (*lehem*, ordinary food or bread; Jdg 13:16).

On the other hand, such an abundance of food leaving (leftover) may have cultic implications as well. One of early church fathers, Ephrem the Syrian (cf. Oden 2002:66)

explained a probable aspect about such a superfluous amount of flour: “The bread and meat, which was in abundance, was not to satisfy the angels but rather so that the blessing might be distributed to all the members of his household.” The existing practice throughout Western Asia supports this view. They prepare food five to ten times more than the quantity of food the invited guests can consume, so that the residue can be feasted by the women and the host of servants and dependents (cf. Bush 1981:288). It is like a sharing blessed fellowship meals (Lv 7:11-21) after offering the required parts (fat and kidney) to the Lord by fire (Lv 3:1-17).

The eating of food by heavenly beings is an exceptional feature of the Abraham narrative (Gn 18:8; 19:3). In parallel narratives divine visitors never eat the food (cf. Jdg 6 & 13). The angel of the Lord turned the offered foods into burnt offerings by a miraculous fire. But in the Abraham narrative the divine visitors are described as eating the offered food. What the author tries to get across to his readers by this description of the eating (cf. Calvin 1965:472; Ross 1988:342-343) seems to suggest the sharing fellowship meal indicating the procedure of making a covenant (Ex.24; Lv.3; 7:11-21). The author of the book of Genesis introduces a fellowship eating for making a covenant in another episode as well (Gn.26: 26-33; cf. 31:22-55).

Thus, the meals in the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) must have some cultic significance to the readers rather than being just ordinary charity food given to the poor and tired strangers. In this way, the author introduced Abraham as a worshipper with keen spiritual awareness in preparing the meal with the implication to be a *Minha* rather than a *Lehem*.

### 3.4.3 Abraham’s Motif for his Selection of a Choice Calf (Gn 18:7)

Letellier (1995:87) asserts, "Attention here is focused on the source of his earthly wealth. The evocation of pastoral plenitude reaches a highpoint in the description of the feast Abraham sets before his guests." Hamilton (1995:11) says that the motif for Abraham providing a calf is to show either his relative prosperity and social standing, or his desire to give his best to his guests, or both. These views focus only on the motive related with the economic value of the food.

We need to turn our attention to the social status of the guests from the perspective of the author as well as that of Middle East custom. In the previous chapter two, I presented many textual proofs to attest the divine or princely identity of the visitors. The nuance of selecting a choice calf must be relevant to the status of the visitors according to ancient Near Eastern custom (cf. Jamieson et al 1990:28; Hartley 1995:178). In other similar scenes in the Bible the host provides "a young goat" for his visitor (Jdg 6:19; 13:15; cf. Gn 27:9). But here Abraham prepared the best meal from a choice calf. What could be the significance of this extraordinary meal? Bush (1981:286-287) introduces a gradation of Arabian hospitality in his *"Notes on the Bedouins"* :

> "The Arabs never indulge in animal food and other luxuries but on the occasion of some great festival, or on the arrival of a stranger. If the guest is a common person, bread is baked and served up with *ayesh*; if the guest is a person of some small consequence, coffee is prepared for him, and also a dish called *behatta* (rice or flour boiled with sweet camel's milk), or that called *ftetat* (baked paste, kneaded up thoroughly with butter); *but for a man of some rank, a kid or lamb is killed*."

Isaac's question to Abraham about the burnt offering (Gn 22:7) seems to reflect a common concept of burnt offering in those days (cf. Hamilton 1976:109). Driver (1904:193) asserts, "Flesh is rarely eaten in the East: the 'calf tender and good' is an indication of Abraham's sense of the distinction of his guests." Then, slaughtering a choice calf implies that it is more than the best food made of a kid of goat in honor of the guests who are in the highest social status like kings (cf. 1Sm 28:24-25; Dilmann 1987:95; Jamieson et al 1990:28; Hartley 2000:178). Sarna (1989:129) explains, "He himself selects the calf for the main dish, a rare delicacy and *a sign of princely hospitality* among pastoralists." Thus, the guests must be regarded as not being ordinary ones.

If readers attempt to find a cultic nuance of the phrase, he may think that the term bAjw" %r:Ü ("Tender and choice") may correspond to the term ~ymiT' ("without blemish" (Ex 12:5 and Lv 3:1; cf. "fat portions from the first born", Gn 4:4; Wenham 1987:103; Hamilton 1976:461). For, *tamim* is the cultic norm for selecting the proper animal for the Lord (cf. Sarna 1989:123). Thus, both terms may be interchangeable to mean "the best one" for the Lord.

Usually kings come with a host of accompanying armed attendants and with camels and horses (cf. Gn 32:6; 1 Ki 10:1-3; Can 3:7). Rich caravans come with a band of men and animals (cf. Gn 37:25, "They *looked up and saw* a caravan"). But in this case there came to the Abraham camp only three men without such animals. Abraham slaughtered a choice calf for them suiting men of the highest social status. Many scholars understand the sudden appearance of the three men as a characteristic of theophanies (cf. Gn 21:17-19; 22:13; Ex 3:2; Jos 5:13; cf. also Zch 2:1,5; 5:1; 6:1; Simpson 1978:617; Gunkel 1997:192; Skinner 1980:299; Sarna 1989:128; Westermann

1985:276; Letellier 1995:80).

Here we are to consider a high level of literary skill of the author expressing his theological intents in tandem with chapter 19. There Lot bakes “bread without yeast” for the two angels who are about to carry out their disastrous mission (cf. Speiser 1964:138; Wenham 1994:54). But in chapter 18 Abraham prepared “a tender and choice calf” for the Lord. As I already mentioned (cf. see ch.2.4.3), scholars also pay attention to the different titles of divine beings used in the opening phrases as proof of recognition of their proper identity (Gn 18:1, “the Lord” and Gn 19:1, “two angels”; cf. Oden 2002:73; Sailhamer 1976:143-145). All these elements attest to Abraham’s cultic motive for preparing the best meal for the Lord.

#### 3.4.3.1 Theological Implication of Offering a Calf to the Lord

The author’s theological motif for Abraham’s offering of a “choice tender calf” instead of a kid of a goat needs to be considered next. There were widespread practices of bull image worship as a high god in the ancient Near East (cf. Eissfeldt 1940:199-215; Wainwright 1933:42-50; Durham 1987:420; Drioton et al 1959:71; Arbeitman 1981:959-1002; Freedman 1992). Especially the deity Apis (bull) was worshipped in prehistoric Egypt: the bull cult in Minoan Crete, bull men and winged bulls in Mesopotamia (cf, Tenney 1977). Therefore, bovine animals, especially cattle (cows or oxen), were not found among pagan cultic offerings: usually a young dog, a little pig, a she-goat, a donkey-foul, or a she-ass was slaughtered (cf. Arnold and Beyer 2002:96-101; Hamilton 1976:431-432; Mathews 1996:170-171; Sarna 1989:114). On the other hand, in the Pentateuch Moses commands Israelites to offer bulls as usual sacrifices to the Lord (cf. Lv 4; 8; 16; Nm 28; 29).

According to the word of Philistine diviners' belief during the days of Judges, even she-cows that were never yoked seemed to be considered as sacred deities as Hindus believe (cf. 1 Sm 6:7; cf. Bergen 1996:100-101; Klein 1983:57-58; Tenney 1997). But the people of the Lord, the Israelites, sacrificed cows as burnt offerings to the Lord (cf. 1 Sm 6:14; Nm 19:1-22). When the Israelites sacrificed fellowship offerings to the Lord, both male and female cattle were acceptable (Lv 3:1).

Thus, the act of slaughtering a calf as "an offering food" to Yahweh in Genesis 18:7-8 was against the standard concept of sacrificial animals in the ancient Mediterranean world (cf. Hamilton 1995:9; Simpson 1978:568-569; Westarmann 1985:138; Skinner 1980:237; Wenham 1987:273; Hartley 1995:131; Botterweck et al 1974; Tenney 1997). Abraham's act of slaughtering a calf may be understood as an aggressive religious attack or "ideal conquest" against the bull-worshipping pagan religion (cf. Sailhamer 1976:112; Glatzer 1982:35).

Readers may get a proleptic example of right worship to the Lord from the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:7-8) in light of the Exodus event (making golden calf idol; cf. Ex 32:1-35; Dt 9:7-29). It could be a contrasting episode with the ones of Israel sinning when they made a "golden calf" during the days of Exodus and again during Jeroboam's reign (Ex 32:1-35; 1 Ki 12:25-33; cf. Durham 1987:419-421; Christensen 2001:186-189). One may say that such an understanding of this episode goes beyond what the text itself allows. But the book of Genesis is generally understood as a prologue to the rest of the Bible (cf. Wolf 1991:79). Proleptic descriptions to the Exodus event are found thematically within all of the Abraham narratives (cf. Gn 12:10-13:2; 15:13-16; 16:1-16; Shailhamer 1976:116; Wenham 1987:291,300; Hamilton 1976:386; Mathews 1996:123).

Therefore, I assert that such a calf offering to the Lord in Genesis 18:7-8 may be proleptic to the right sacrificial offerings in the Mosaic Law (cf. Lv chs 1 and 2). Thus, Abraham is described as the model of a right Yahweh worshiper rather than that of being generous for weary strangers.

### 3.4.4 Underlying Theological Motive for Abraham's Meal having no Grape Products

Abram waged war with three allies (Gn 14:13, 24). One of them was called Eschcol, which means "cluster of grapes" or "a bunch of grapes" (cf. Brown 1979). This reminds one of the valleys in Hebron, which is named Eshcol, where the twelve Israelite spies were impressed by its wondrous cluster of grapes (Nm 13:23-24; 32:9; Dt 1:24; Mathews 1996:147; Wenham 1987:313). The spies took back some of the wondrous grapes on a staff from the valley of Eschol in Hebron (Nm 13:22-24). Thus, one can conclude that Hebron was the center of a grape-growing country (cf. Gn 40:11-19; Simpson 1978:618; Wenham 1987:313). The geographical setting of Hebron is famous for the fertility of its soil. Therefore, for readers who are familiar with the profuse environment conditions (Nm 13:22-24; 14:7), the place name Hebron may remind them of various fruits especially grapes to produce wine (cf. cf. Gn 2:9; Tenney 1977).

But when the author depicts the meal for the visitors, he does not mention any product of fruit trees usually found in the area as can be seen in an Ugaritic text (Gn 18:6-8; cf. Aqhat, KTU 1.17 V 2-33; Hamori 2004:54-56). The kind of food Abraham offered to the visitors is typically those of the nomad (cf. Bush 1981:286-287; Gunkel 1997:195; Westermann 1985:278). Readers who know that Hebron was the center of a grape-growing country might question why there were no wine and raisins on

Abraham's meal (cf. Gunkel 1997:195; Simpson 1978:619). One probable reason is that the author knew what the effect was of getting drunk with wine, for he reported that Lot was intoxicated by wine drinking and conducted shameful acts (cf. Gn 19:33-35; Sailhamer 1976:159; Simpson 1978:619). Then, readers may think of three probabilities: (1) the inhabitants around Hebron were not cultivating grapevines at that time, or (2) Abraham had no relationship with farming tribes, or (3) he abstained from taking such food.

One may assume that grape vines were growing already in the days of Abraham in the Hebron area. For the author reports that Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine for Abraham and his soldiers who were tired (Gn 14:18; Mathews 1996:149; Hamilton 1976:408). The Sodom area was also known as a grape growing area (cf. Dt 32:32-33, 38; Pr 23:29-35; Is 16:7-10; Jr 48:11-12; Simpson 1978:632; Merrill 1994: 419-422; Hamilton 1995:52). Considering these facts and remembering that the author includes the shameful results of intoxication with wine in the parallel episode of Lot, the author might possibly be unwilling to depict Abraham as one who prepares grape-products for the Lord (Gn 19:30-38; cf. Gn 9:20-27; Simpson 1978:618; Wenham 1994:42; Mathews 1996:211, 214, 245).

Simpson (1978:618) asserts that the absence of grape products (wine and raisin) among the content of the meal Abraham prepared can be attributed to the author's theology, for, the author is aware of its abuses already (Gn 9:21-25). Then, the fact that there are no grapevine products on Abraham's meal may be considered as being significant. For, Abraham's nomadic environment and his sober life style (cf. Jr 35:1-19) are contrasted with Lot's city life and his "being unaware" because of drunkenness (cf. Simpson 1978:631; Gunkel 1997:195; Hartley 1995:190). Considering that Hebron was

designated as a city of refuge, where the descendants of Aaron were assigned to dwell (Jos 20:7; 1 Chr. 6:55-57). The author might have tried to allude that Abraham was the forerunner of sober priests and Levites who officiate duty in the sanctuary in later days (Lv 10:1-9; cf. Nm 6:3-4; Jr 35:1-19; cf. Wenham 1987:199).

### 3.4.5 Diverse Theological Implications of the Lord's Eating of the meals

Generally the meals offered to the Lord are understood as being proleptic to the covenantal fellowship meals. Abraham's household ate the leftovers of the meals (Ex 24:11; cf. Ross 1988:343; Bush 1981; Exell 1900:5). Also this is understood as the foreshadow of "fellowship offering" (Lv 3:1-17; 7:11-15; cf. Wenham 1994:47) or the "sanctuary showbread" in the Temple (Ex 25:30; 2Sm 21:4, 6; 1 Chr 9:32; Neh 10:33; Ps 78:19; Harris 1980; Simpson 1978:1026). This view of foreshadow of the "sanctuary showbread" is the result of considering the significance of fine flour, the *solet*. High priests eat the showbread in the holy place on behalf of the Lord (Lv 24:8-9). This symbolizes the thankfulness for the bread the Lord provided (cf. Ps 78:19; Ex 16:1-36; Harris et al 1980; Simpson 1978:1026). If one considers "a choice, tender calf," it will be resulted to denote a "fellowship offering" (Lv 3:1-5; cf. Wenham 1994:47). Thus symbolic nuance of each element of food is diverse.

Could the meals for the Lord (Gn 18:6-8) be proleptic even to the Passover meal (Ex 12:1-30; cf. Oden 2002:66)? Passover meals consisted of both mutton of lamb and unleavened bread. They were eaten right ahead of the Lord's doomed strike on all of the firstborn. And the eating event in Abraham's camp happened right ahead of the imminent destruction of Sodom city.

"Unleavened bread" in Genesis 19:3 draws obvious attention. It has been

understood as a light meal made in haste that has a sense of expediency without any cultic nuance (cf. Driver 1904:198; Von Rad 1972:217; Letellier 1995:144; Davidson 1979:72; Hamilton 1995:33; Mathews 1996:234-235). But Speiser (1964:139) asserts that the "Baked bread without yeast" (Gn 19:3) in Lot's house right ahead of its destruction may already harbinger the Passover meal. For in the book of Exodus the term "unleavened bread" carries a ritual nuance of the Passover bread (Ex 12:8, 18, 20; 23:15). The mood of making unleavened bread in haste here (Gen 19:3) looks similar to the hurried mood in the very night of the Passover meal (cf. Ex 12:11, 20, 39; Harris 1980). Mathews (1996:235) finds that there is an un-relevant use of two different words *mishteh* (feast) and *matstsah* (unleavened bread) here: "He made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread" (Ex 19:3). The term "feast," `hT,v.mi` (*mishteh*) means "wine drinking," "banquet," "feast" stemming from a verb `htv` ("to drink," "feast," cf. Dn 1:5, 8, 16; Ezr 3:7; Harris 1980). The word is used to denote a special meal prepared for honored guests as well as for a wedding feast (Gn 26:30; 29:22; Jdg 14:10-17; 2Sam 3:20). In contradiction to this, unleavened bread surely denotes an inferior meal made in a hurry (cf. Hamilton 1995:33). "Unleavened bread," `hC'm;` (*matstsah*) is an ordinary bread quickly prepared for unexpected guests (Gn 19:3; Jud 6:19-21; 1Sam 28:24; cf. Gunkel 1997:207; Sarna 1989:135). Such simple unleavened bread in Lot's house may hardly be matched well with the concept of a banquet or a feast. This is a sure incongruity in the passage (cf. Mathews 1996:235).

Then, what did the author wish to intend by this rhetorical incongruity? I assert that the author tries to foreshadow the Passover feast by this rhetorical skill. The two different terms *mishteh* ("feast") and *matstsah* ("unleavened bread") may be relevant to each other thematically. For, yearly holidays were also called a *mishteh* (cf. Es 9:19, 22

and Job 1:4-5; Harris, Archer & Waltke 1980; Brown 1979; Sarna 1989:135). Then, the term "unleavened bread" (*matstsah*) may remind of "feast" (*mishteh*) of the Unleavened Bread (or the Passover). The author of this narrative seemed to try to imply foreshadow the Lord's Feast (*mishteh*) of Unleavened Bread by this description (Lv 23:4-8). Then, how the nuances of the meal in Genesis 18 can be related to that of the Passover meal?

#### 3.4.5.1 Indications of Foreshadowing Passover in the Plot of Genesis 18

Chapters 17 and 18 of Genesis are not independent of each other in terms of themes and time (cf. Hamilton 1995:5; Sarna 1989:128). The phrase "the Lord appeared to him" (instead of Abraham; Gn 18:1) is significant here again linking the two episodes. The precedent of "him" was found in the account of circumcision, where Abraham obeyed by doing circumcision promptly (Gn 17:23-27; cf. Sailhamer 1976:143; Von Rad 1972:203; Westermann 1985:262, 271; Skinner 1980:289). The function of this passage (Gn 17:12, 23-27) foreshadows the Passover (cf. Westermann 1985:271). For the Lord demands exactly the same regulation of circumcision for the eating of the Passover meal (Ex 12:43-49): "You who wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover must have all the males in the household circumcised" (Ex 12:48; cf. Jos 5:2-10; Simpson 1978:921; Wolf 1991:139).

Right here the author seems to imply that Abraham and his family members are qualified to eat the blessed Passover meal, for they finished the demand of circumcision with willing hearts (Gn 17:23-27). Therefore, the partaking of the offered meal at Abraham's camp (Gn 18:1-9) may also be proleptic for the Passover meal as the "unleavened bread" implies (Gn 19:3). If the author traced the origin of circumcision already in Genesis 17, then the following event (Gn 18:1-8) may become the alluding of

the Passover feast (cf. Skinner 1980:289; Wolf 1991:80). The haste mood in Abraham's camp (Gn 18:6-7) may imply the hurried mood during the night of Passover (Ex 12:11, 33; cf. Durham 1987:154). In fact the baked bread in Abraham's camp was also hurriedly baked bread at noontime (cf. Gn 18:1, 6).

The eating of the two men (two angels) in Lot's house (Gn 19:1, 12) can be compared with three men's eating (the Lord with two angels) in Abraham's camp (Gn 18:1, 22; cf. Uffenheimer 1975:145-153; Hartley 2000:177; Mathews 1996:212). Considering the interwoven plot of the narrative with the circumcision event (Gn 17 and 18), the probable motif for such eating may be understood as the prolepsis of the Passover meal as well.

There is a grave lacking element in the eating of the Passover meal in Lot's house. It is the fact that Lot was exempted from the first covenantal rite of circumcision for the whole household of Abraham (cf. Gn 17:23-27). From the perspective of the interwoven plot in Genesis 17, 18 and 19, I assume that Lot's no having been circumcised might possibly be one of the reasons that the two men (two angels) were unwilling to accept Lot's invitation: "No, we will spend the night in the square" (Gn 19:2). Whereas, the three men (the Lord with two angels) accepts the invitation of Abraham without hesitation: "Very well, do as you say" (Gn 18:5). Thus, Abraham is introduced as the initiator of circumcision and the blessed one who ate the Passover meal typologically for the first time. Such a Passover motif may also be attested by the episodes related with the later life in Egypt in all of the Abraham cycle (cf. Gn 12:10-13:2; 15:13-16; 16:1-16).

#### 3.4.5.2 Indications of Exodus in the Abraham Cycle

Egypt is described in the book of Genesis as a symbol of safety and provision for the patriarchs in a period of severe drought (Gn 12:10-13:2; 42, 43, and 46; cf. Hamilton 1976:380; Skinner 1980:248; Westermann 1985:164). But, generally Abraham's going down to Egypt (Gn 12:10-3:4) is understood as foreshadowing the later bondage in Egypt (cf. Shailhamer 1976:116; Wenham 1987:291,300; Hamilton 1976:386; Mathews 1996:123; Sarna 1989:93). In the Abraham cycle there are several passages that apparently foreshadow the Exodus of the Israelites (Gn 12:10-3:4; 15:13-16; 16 and 21:8-21).

Abraham's acquiring of bridal gifts (Gn 12:16; 14:2) foreshadows the taking of valuables in the event of Exodus 12:35-36. God's intervention to deliver Abraham and his wife by inflicting serious diseases ( [gn skin diseases) on Pharaoh and his household could foreshadow the plague ( [gn) in Exodus 11:1 (cf. Wenham 1987:290; Skinner 1980:250; Wolf 1991:131). The term xlv (*shala,* "to send") in the phrase, "They sent him away"(Gn 12:20) foreshadows Pharaoh's sending away (xlv ) of captive Israelites (Ex 4:21; 6:1; 11:1; 12:33; cf. Hamilton 1976:386). And the same term is used later in releasing the exiles from Babylon (Is 45:13; cf. Zch 9:11; Harris et al 1980).

A prophecy about the life of slavery in Egypt is found in Genesis 15:13-15 (cf. Wenham 1987:291). Critical scholars generally understand this passage as a work of a redactor (cf. Skinner 1980:282; Von Rad 1972:187; Westermann 1985:227). Then, this is the very passage in which one can find the author's theological intent, which emphasizes how the life of Abraham foreshadows the history of Israel (cf. Wenham 1987:335; Sailhamer 1976:131).

The episode of the Egyptian Hagar (Gn 16 and 21:8-21) may be related in reverse to the Exodus event (cf. Von Rad 1972:195; Westermann 1985:235-236; Sarna

(1989:119): the name Hagar (rgh, "the stranger") as the word play of ger(rg; "stranger"), and Sarah's "harsh treatment" on Hagar as the "harsh treatment" on Hebrews in reverse (Ex 1:11-12; cf. Hamilton 1976:386; Brown 1979). The author of the Abraham cycle seems to try to foreshadow the great event of Exodus reflectively (cf. Wenham 1987:291-292). Thus, these foreshadowing elements of Exodus may support the view of Passover feast about the meal in Abraham's camp (Gn 181:1-8).

### 3.4.6 Summary

Abraham is characterized as a worshipper by his preparation of food for the visitors. There are many evidences to attest that the food indicated has a cultic nuance rather than being just ordinary food for strangers. The quality and the quantity of food are related to the motive for preparation by the host as well the social status of the visitors. Different motives for preparing meals become apparent through inter-textual study. Different motives indicate different spiritual senses of covenant partners. Gideon asks for a sign to authenticate the genuineness of the promise of God by preparing a huge amount of hx'n>mi (*minha*; "cultic offering" to the Lord; Jdg 6:18; cf. Ex 30:9; Lv 7:37; 9:4). By this depiction, the author implies Gideon's partial recognition of the deity (Jdg 6:13-14, 17, 36-40).

In Samson's birth narrative, the angel of the Lord called the food Manoah intended to prepare ~x,l, (*lehem;* "food" for man; Jdg 13:16; Ex 25:39). The motive for the preparing of food here was quite civil to welcome a human visitor (Jdg 13:16). The author tells the reason: "Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the Lord" (Jdg 13:16).

The fact that Abraham ordered Sarah to get three Seahs of fine flour to make

bread indicates his recognition of the divinity of the visitors. For, the quality and quantity imply an apparent cultic usage (Gn 18:6). The two awkwardly combined Hebrew nouns tl,soê xm;q<å (*solet kemah*) draw attention of scholars: *Kemah* means ordinary inferior kind of flour (cf. Is 47:2; I Ki 17:12); *Solet* means finely ground flour (cf. Ezk 16:13). LXX and Vulgate translators had taken only *solet* (cf. Lv 24:5). It may indicate the type for the "sanctuary showbread" in the Temple (Ex 25:30; 2Sm 21:4, 6).

The Hebrew noun tAg*[u (*ugot*: "baked bread"; Gen 18:6) was translated by LXX scholars into evgkrufi,aj (*enkryphia*,"secret or hidden bread"). LXX scholars did not use a Greek noun a;rtoj (bread, loaf of bread). The LXX scholars clearly decided to give cultic nuances to the food through their translation.

The amount of three *seah* of flour has a cultic nuance. For the amount of tree *seahs* (around 39 liters) implies offering to the deity. Gideon prepared a huge amount of cultic offering *minha* (a young goat and an *ephah* of flour (around 22 liters) for a single angel of the Lord (Jdg 6:18-19). Then, Abraham's huge amount of food also indicates hx'n>mi (*minha*) rather than ~x,l, (*lehem*; Jdg 13:16). The meals in the episodes of both Gideon and Samson are offered as burnt offerings while the meals in Abraham's camp are shared with the Lord and His covenant people. This element is understood as the foreshadowing of "fellowship offering" (Lv 3:1-17; 7:11-15).

Abraham prepared the best meal from a choice calf. It is an indication of Abraham's sense of the distinction of his guests who are in the highest status. In other entertainment scenes, the host usually provides "kids of goats" (Gn 22:7; 27:9; Jdg 6:19; 13:15). Usually kings or rich ones come accompanied by armed attendants with camels and horses (cf. Gn 32:6; 37:25 1 Ki 10:1-3). Abraham's camp was visited by

only three men without any animals, but Abraham butchered a choice calf for them, which indicates that he discerned the divinity of them (cf. Gn 21:17-19; 22:13; Ex 3:2; Jos 5:13; cf. also Zch 2:1,5; 5:1; 6:1).

Abraham's offering of a "choice tender calf" could be contrasted with Israel's sin of making a "golden calf" (Ex 32:1-35; 1 Ki 12:25-33). There were widespread practices of bull image worship in ancient Near East. Then the offering of "a choice tender calf" to the Lord may imply "ideal conquest" of the land for the Lord. Abraham is described as the model of a just Yahweh worshiper. The offering of "a choice tender calf" denotes a "fellowship offering" as well (Lev 3:1-5). Thus symbolic nuance of each element of food is diverse.

There are common elements between Abraham's table and the Passover meals. Abraham obeyed the execution of circumcision (Gn 17:23-27), which is the strict pre-requisite for keeping the Passover (Ex 12:43-49; Jos 5:2-10). The meals are prepared in a hurried mood (Gn 18:2; 19:3; Ex 12:11, 20, 39), and they were eaten right ahead of the Lord's doomed strikes. Thus, Abraham is depicted as the one who ate the Passover meal typologically as well as being the initiator of circumcision (cf. Gn 12:10-13:2; 15:13-16; 16:1-16).

Even though Hebron is the center of a grape-growing area (cf. Nm 13:22-24; 14:7), there was no wine or raisins on Abraham's meal (Gn 18:6-8). Abraham's nomadic environment and his sober life (cf. Jr 35:1-19) are contrasted with Lot's city life and his drunkenness (cf. Gn 9:21-25; 19:33-35). Abraham is depicted as the forerunner of both a Nazirite (Nm 6:3-4; Jr 35:1-19) and a sober priest who officiates the duty in the sanctuary in later days (Lev 10:1-9).

# CHAPTER FOUR: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND SCENE AND ITS THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE (GN 18:9-15)

A narrative remark (Gn 18:11) on Abraham and Sarah being advanced in years is inserted into the dialogue in verse 11 of this second scene (Gn 18:9-15). It tells that the fulfillment of the promised son was delayed so long that readers are now curious about the probable reasons for it (cf. Wenham 1987:273). There is no apparent or direct explanation by the author about the reason for this great delay in his narrative remark (Gn 18:11). So this study expects that some elements in the narrative materials might indicate any underlying motif for it (cf. Venter 2005:16; Chisolm 2006:29).

The motive for the Lord's endeavor to give Sarah the unbelievable promise draws attention of readers. The descriptions of Sarah's lacking faith that made the Lord angry seem to imply that Sarah does not deserve to receive the promised son (cf. Gn 21:8-21; cf. Jeansonne 1990:18-21; Speiser (1964:131). Therefore, this study asserts that the birth of Isaac must be attributed to God's mercy.

The episode in Genesis 18:9-15 is the first example of deliverance from the trouble of barrenness in the Old Testament (cf. Wenham 1987:273; Hamilton 1976:72-74; Mathews 1996:265-267; Hasel 1998:181-182). The theological perspective of the first barren matriarch (Gn 18:9-15) seems to stand in relationships with the following barren matriarchs' narratives in the Old Testament. Research on all issues mentioned above will be dealt with in this chapter.

## 4.1 Plot Structure of the Second Scene (Gn 18:9-15)

There is no change of setting for the second scene. The focus of the camera shifts from the visitors to Sarah. Sarah is listening to the dialogue between the Lord and

Abraham from the entrance of the tent behind Abraham (cf. Westermann 1985:279; Skinner 1980:301). In the second scene (vv 9-15), the hurried mood of the first scene depicted by Abraham's busy actions (vv 6-8) is stopped. The mood changes into a serious dialogue at the meal. The dialogue expresses the psychological responses of the characters and their conflicting thinking (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Von Rad 1972:207).

The dialogue is opened with the question (Gn 18:9a): "Where is your wife Sarah?" The inquiry after Sarah effects the transition from the first scene to the second scene (cf. Westermann 1985:279). The scene consists of a tripartite dialogue concerning the annunciation of the birth taking place between the Lord, Abraham, and Sarah with some narrative remarks in between (cf. Letellier 1995:103; Ross 1988:339). Sarah becomes the subject in the tripartite dialogue (cf. Westermann 1985:274, 279; Mathews 1996:216). The whole dialogue (Gn 18:9-15) may be analyzed as having two structural parts separated by an intermittent narration (Gn 18:11). The first part of dialogue can be plotted as follows:

(1) The Lord's question (Gn 18:9a): "Where is your wife Sarah?"

(2) Abraham's simple response (Gn 18:9b): "There, in the tent."

(3) Giving annunciation of the birth (Gn 18:10a): "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son" (cf. Gn 17:16, 19; 21:18).

The interrogation (Gn 18:9a) shows the beginning of tension to those readers who are familiar with Eastern culture (cf. Coats 1983:137; Hamilton 1995:11; Sarna

1989:130; Westermann 1985:279). For it stimulates the imagination of the readers and focuses their attention on several possible nuances of the question. Culturally in the Near East, to enquire about the health of the host's wife would be considered as a down right insult to the host (cf. Gunkel 1997:196; Bush 1981:289; Hartley 1995:178; Calvin 1965:472; Bush 1981:289). One may imagine that Abraham and Sarah must have been totally surprised, for the question also reveals the omniscient knowledge of the Lord about Sarah's condition of barrenness (cf. Hamilton 1995:11; Calvin 1965:472; Gunkel 1997:196; Hartley 1995:178).

Abraham's answer, however, was very simple without any depiction of an upset or a surprised response (Gn 18:9b; cf. Hamilton 1995:11), "There, in the tent," which indicates that Sarah was nearby but unseen. Culturally women were not allowed to be present in the company of male visitors (cf. Gunkel 1997:196; Hartley 1995:178). The flow of the dialogue is interrupted by an intermittent narration (vv 11-12a; cf. Venter 2005:18; Westermann 1985:280). The narrator explains the physical background of Sarah's skeptical reaction to the promise of the Lord (cf. Sarna 1989:130; Hartley 1995:179; Hamilton 1995:12). The second part of the dialogue continues as follows:

(4) Sarah's skeptical response (Gn 18:12)

(5) The Lord's mild rebuke and reiteration of the annunciation (Gn 18:13-14)

(6) Sarah's being afraid and her denial of laughter (Gn 18:15a): "I did not laugh."

(7) The Lord's final correcting rebuke (Gn 18:15b): "Yes, you did laugh."

The second part (Gn 18:12-15) consists of two elements in the dialogue (cf. Westermann 1985:274; Hartley 1995:177; cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Mathews

1996:216):

(1) Sarah's skeptical response to the Lord's final reconfirmation of Isaac's birth with a time limit.

(2) The Lord's instructive rebuke and reiteration of the word of reconfirmation

Thus, the narrative presents tension between the Lord and Sarah who doubts his words (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Hamori 2004:18). A noteworthy aspect in this second part of the dialogue is that Sarah's speech is an internal monologue, e.g., she is out of sight in the opening of the tent speaking to her-self (cf. Mathews 1996:218). In other words, the dialogue depicts the psychological responses of the characters (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Von Rad 1972:207). What is astonishing here is that although Sarah's initial words were not directed to somebody else audibly, the Lord did hear what she said (cf. Mathews 1996:218). The two questions "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' reveal the divine knowledge of the Lord about the thoughts of Sarah (Gn 18:13; cf. Westermann 1985:281). Such exceptional perception might have given to Sarah credibility in the visitor's unlikely prediction of a child (cf. Mathews 1996:218).

The narrative reaches its climax in the statement, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gn 18:14a). This sentence exposes God's omnipotent saving will (cf. Von Rad 1972:207). The repeated annunciation of the birth within a set time (Gn 18:10a, 14b), "about this time next year" (cf. Gn 17:21; 2 Ki 4:16) indicates the Lord's sincere pathos to fulfill His promise (cf. Hayes and Holladay 2007:93; Wenham 1994:48; Venter 2005:4, 7). The structural elements, especially the quotations of (4), (5), and (6) in the

second part of the second scene, deal with the issue of the faith of the covenant partner (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Venter 2005:11, 17).

The narrator highlights the exchange of opinions in the last dialogue ("I did not laugh" and "Yes, you did laugh") hinting at the child's name to be Isaac ("laughter"; cf. Hartley 1995:180; Ross 1988:339). Suddenly Sarah starts addressing the Lord probably coming out of the tent. The dialogue is abruptly ended here with the words "Yes, you did laugh," without easing the tension and telling the end result of the event. The narrator seems to leave the final correcting word of the Lord as a recondite hint at the name of the child, for Abraham and Sarah were to remember later on their response to the promise when the child Isaac ("laughter") is born (cf. Ross 1988:345; Westermann 1985:282). The last words of the Lord obviously expose the omniscient divine knowledge of the visitors.

This narrative unit was not developed to the common pattern of annunciation stories, for it loses the fulfillment part the story (cf. 2 Ki 4:8-17; 1 Sm 1:1-20). However, it stimulates readers to have interest of a plot development reaching to Genesis 21:1-7 that ranges beyond the inserted episodes (cf. Gn 18:16-20:18; Coats 1983:138).

### 4.2 Characterization of Abraham (Gn 18:9)

The question, "Where is your wife Sarah?" is generally understood as a rhetorical device to open up a purposeful conversation on Sarah's problem (cf. Ross 1988:343; Sarna 1989:130; Gunkel 1997:196; Mathews 1996:217). The visitors are assumed to know her whereabouts already (cf. Gn 3:9; 4:9; 16:8; Ross 1988:343; Sarna 1989:130; Gunkel 1997:196; Mathews 1996:217).

The question may be understood as the moving of the camera's focus from

Abraham to Sarah (cf. Westermann 1985:279). But Abraham is not shifted into the background. He is still present as a part of the scene (cf. Sailhamer 1976:147). Abraham's simple answer to the question of the Lord seems to present two determinative elements to characterize Abraham.

Firstly Abraham is put in a more favorable light than Sarah. Because in this scene the Lord (literally "they") directly addresses Abraham about Sarah (Gn 18:9), and the Lord (literally "he" in verse 10;"Yahweh" in verse 13) delivers his message to Abraham about Sarah continuously (Gn 18:10, 13-14; Sailhamer 1976:147; Hartley 1995:179). Throughout the Abraham narrative, the Lord does not talk directly to Sarah but keeps talking to Abraham only (Gn 12:1, 7; 13:14; 15:1; 17:15-21; 21:12; cf. Jdg 13:3, 9).

Secondly the author describes Abraham's superior spiritual awareness to that of Sarah in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15). The question, "Where is your wife Sarah?" implies that Sarah had not yet shown herself or that Abraham had not introduced Sarah to the strangers in accordance with Hebrew custom (cf. Skinner 1980:301; Gunkel 1997:196). According to the ancient Near East culture, as previously said, if one asked someone after the health of his wife, it would be considered as offering him a downright insult (cf. Bush 1981:289). Therefore, if the visitors were ordinary human beings, the question, "Where is your wife Sarah?" would have been a daring question. Many scholars therefore assume that the question would be a downright insult to Abraham in terms of the traditional culture of the Near East (cf. Gunkel 1997:196; Hartley 2000:178; Bush 1981:289). Currently the Muslims never enquire from each other about their wives (cf. Gunkel 1997:196; Hartley 2000:178). Therefore, understood from this angle, this question should have triggered Abraham's offended feelings. The author,

however, does not give any indications whatsoever about any offended feelings experienced by Abraham (cf. Hamilton 1995b: 11; Bush 1981:289).

If Abraham had already recognized the divinity of his visitors at the initial encounter, then it is logical that he would not have any offended feelings here (cf. Hamilton 1972:418; Von Rad 1972:183; Speiser 1964:149; Sarna 1989:142). Then, the nuance of the Lord's question is rather authoritative dealing with an inferior human covenant partner. Abraham answered the Lord immediately, "There, in the tent." Such a simple and immediate answer without any offended feelings implies that Abraham shows a discreet listening attitude as a prophet who stands before the Lord.

The fact that they know the new name of Abraham's wife Sarah indicates that these men were not ordinary human travelers (cf. Hartley 2000:178). If this was the first time that the disguised deity of the visitors was exposed in this episode, as some scholars assert, then, Abraham would have expressed great surprise (cf. Gn 18:9, 13; cf. Gunkel 1997:196; Wenham 1994:47; Westermann 1985:281; Calvin 1992:472; Skinner 1980:301). But Abraham is depicted as the one who answers plainly without any scared response (Gn 18:9b; cf. Hamilton 1995:11). Such a simple reaction is contrasted with the terrified responses in other parallels that depict graphically the sudden exposure of the disguised deity (cf. Ex 3:6; Jos 5:14; Jdg 6:22-24; 13:22).

### 4.2.1 Abraham through Inter-textual Comparison (Gn 18:9; Jdg 13:1-25)

Apparently Sarah was embarrassed and afraid of the Lord as she realized that even her thinking was exposed to the omniscient knowledge of the Lord: "Sarah was afraid, so she lied" (cf. Gn 18:15). These aspects in the Abraham narrative may be compared with those of between Manoah and his wife: Manoah was scared and afraid of

being killed as he realized the divinity of the man, but his wife was not afraid of it (Jdg 13:22-23). The author describes Manoah's dull spiritual sense in this way, whereas, he describes the spiritual sensitivity of the wife of Manoah (cf. Jdg 13:19-21; Block 1999:413; Cundall 1968:159; Boling 1964:219).

Then, Abraham's simple reply to God indicates that Abraham is a prophet who had already recognized the divinity of the visitors during the first moments of their encounter as this study asserted already (Gn 18:2; see ch. 3.3 and 3.3.1). The author characterizes Abraham as a prophet who has a keen spiritual awareness in this way.

In the Samson narrative the angel of the Lord also keeps a distance from Manoah but he shows a special favor to the wife of Manoah by appearing to her only repeatedly (cf. Jdg 13:1-25; cf. Moore 1989:222; Morris 1968:158-159; Block 1999:412). The Lord seems to keep a distance from Sarah like "the angel of the Lord" who keeps evading his direct appearance to Manoah (cf. Jdg 13:8-9; Block 1999:406, 419). Thus, the author depicts Abraham as the one being more favored than Sarah.

### 4.2.2 Characterization of Abraham by Indication of his Silent Attitude (Gn 18:9-15)

The previous description of Abraham's active character flattens out into that of a silent observer of the dialogue between the Lord and Sarah in the second scene (cf. Venter 2006:12). Abraham says nothing in response to the extraordinary promise and these two rhetorical questions (cf. Gn 18:10, 14; Gunkel 1997:197). While the Lord is paying close attention to the problem of Sarah, Abraham just stands there silently (Gn 18:9-15; cf. Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:48-49; Calvin 1965:476; Mathews 1996:218; Jarick 2000:84: Bush 1981:290; Westermann 1985:280-281). Sarna

(1989:130) says that this is a discreet silence on Abraham's side. Von Rad (1972:208) says that Abraham's silence is beautiful; it gives the reader time to reflect on the events. The author's depiction of Abraham as a quiet recipient in hearing the news is one of the significant characterization traits (cf. Brueggmann 1982:158). Then, what kind of imagination may readers have about the nuance of his silence?

Firstly, Abraham's silence may be understood as the proper attitude for one who receives the message of the Lord (cf. Hamilton 1995:14; Westermann 1985:279; Sarna 1989:130). When a servant stands before someone in higher authority, it is proper to be silent before him (Gn 43:15; Ex 9:10; Nm 27:2, 21; cf. Botterweck et al 1974). Such a listening posture in the face of the word of the Lord is usually depicted with the phrase "to stand before Yahweh" (Dt 4:10; 19:17; Jr 7:10; 15:1; cf. Harris 1980; Brown 1979). The author seems to be constant aware that Abraham stands in the presence of the Lord. Such a discrete attitude by Abraham may be contrasted with Sarah's embarrassed and fearful response exposing her inner thoughts (Gn 18:13-15; cf. Skinner 1980:302).

Secondly, it seems to depict Abraham's cautious observing attitude. Abraham seems to observe in silence how the Lord deals with his skeptical and obstinate wife (cf. Gn 21:11-13). When it comes to dealing with Sarah's obstinacy in the matter of her barrenness, Abraham was passive (Gn 16:1-6; cf. Roop 1989:118; Mathews 1996:269). When Sarah accused Abraham, his response was again passive and he conceded Sarah the right to control the matter misusing her right to mistreat Hagar (Gn 16:5-6; cf. Roop 1987:118; Hartley 1995:165). In a later event Sarah's hot temper functions again as a source of grief to Abraham (Gn 21:8-12; cf. Morris 1976:368). Thus, Abraham is caught in a predicament that polygamists always experience (cf. Mathews 1996:269; Wenham 1994:7-8; Hartley 1995:165-166). Abraham experienced harsh troubles by listening to

Sarah's persuasion passively like Adam listened to Eve (cf. Gn 16:1-6; cf. Roop 1989:118; Mathews 1996:269; Hartley 1995:165; Wenham 1994:7). Therefore, when the Lord deals with Sarah's barrenness, Abraham seems to be cautious in this second scene (Gn 18:9-15).

Abraham's passive role against his wife stands in stark contrast with his decisive and courageous role against the neighboring five kings by delivering the captives from them (Gn 14:13-24; cf. Hamilton 1976:373; Roop 1987:107; Sailhamer 1976:121, 123; Sarna 1989:103; Westermann 1985:207). In contrast to these depictions, Abraham's role is passive and not exemplary in relation to his wife Sarah (Gn 12:11-20; 20:1-16). Therefore, one may imagine that Abraham might have kept silent to see how the Lord handles such sensitive matters expecting some good results.

Thirdly, it seems to depict Abraham's empathetic listening attitude. For, Abraham also responded negatively when he heard the unbelievable news in a former event (Gn 17:17-18; cf. Wenham 1994:48; Hartley 1995:173; Westermann 1985:268; Sailhamer 1976:140; Hamilton 1995:12-13). Now he observes the same skeptical attitude of Sarah, therefore he seems to wait silently for the Lord's response. If Sarah's laughing was a big mistake before the Lord, then Abraham is the accomplice of the mistake. Thus, Abraham also seems to be rebuked and corrected together with Sarah again by the Lord in his silent standing posture.

### 4.3 Characterization of Sarah (Gn 18:9-15)

By the question "Where is your wife Sarah?" the camera's focus moved from Abraham to Sarah (cf. Westermann 1985:279). Abraham's answer "There, in the tent" indicates that Sarah was nearby but out of sight (cf. Hartley 1995:178). According to the

depiction itself, the author reports attentively where Sarah was, and how Sarah was thinking: “Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him” (v 10); “Sarah laughed to herself” (v 12). Readers need to pay closer attention to the response of Sarah to the message of the Lord, and to the meaningful exchange of the dialogue between the Lord and Sarah.

The subject of the divine announcement is Sarah’s conception, but the dialogue rather focuses on Sarah’s skeptical response to the annunciation than on the announcement itself (cf. Roop 1987:126; Mathews 1996:216; Sailhamer 1976:147). The author explains the reason of Sarah’s laughter (Gen 18:11, cf. Wenham 1994:48): “Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of child-bearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought” (cf. Jarick 2000:84). So the inward speech, “After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?” (Gn 18:12), indicates Sarah’s skeptical reaction to the annunciation (cf. Chisholm 2006:57).

Sarah’s thought of incredulity and laughter provoked two rhetorical questions of the Lord: “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gn 18:13-14a). These two questions are understood by many scholars as rather rebuking her small faith (cf. Dillmann 1897:96; Hartley 1995:179; Brugemann 1982:159; Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:49; Hamilton 1995:13; Mathews 1996:218; Bush 1981:291). The question “Is anything too difficult (hard) for the Lord?” (Gn 18:14) also indicates Sarah’s apparent lack of faith in God’s omniscience and omnipotence as Creator who is able to fulfill what He has promised (cf. Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:49; Calvin 1965:476; Mathews 1996:218; Ex 3:20; 2 Sm 1:20; Speiser 1964:130; Driver 1904:194; Driver 1979; Keil 1996:146; Harris et al

1980; Botterweck et al 1974; Boling 1964:222; Sarna 1989:127; Westermann 1985:268).

Thus, the effect of the two rhetorical questions seems to remove any unbelieving thought from the mind of Sarah (cf. Bush 1981:291; Hamilton 1995:14; Speiser 1964:130). The Lord reaffirms his promise to Sarah by repeating the original assurance of verse 10 “I will return to you the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son” (cf. Wenham 1994:49). Thus the author depicts Sarah the first matriarch not as the national heroin (model of faith) but as the weak human being (cf. Sarna 1989:130; Brueggemann 1982:158).

Sarah’s telling a lie (Gn 18:15a) develops another tension now reaching a peak, because she commits a second sin by lying again in addition to her first sin of unbelief: “I did not laugh” (cf. Hamilton 1995:14; Bush 1981:292). One may understand such a lying as a grave fault in the presence of the Lord (cf. Speiser 1964:131). But the narrator explains sympathetically why Sarah told a lie: “She was afraid, so she lied.”

Sarah’s motive of telling a lie was probably being afraid because of the fact that all her thoughts are exposed to the omniscient God (Gn 18:15a; Mathews 1996:219; Hartley 1995:180; Sailhamer 1976:148; Von Rad 1972:207; cf. Gn 3:8; Westermann 1985:282; Hamilton 1995:14).

Thus the basic elements of the dialogue in the second part (Gn 18:12a-15) describe Sarah’s skeptical character in contrast to the Lord’s faithfulness (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Venter 2005:11, 17; Cassuto 1964:85-87; Mathews 1996:192-193; Wenham 1984:14-15; Sarna 1989:128; Jarick 2000:84: Bush 1981:290; Wenham 1994:48; Westermann 1985:280-281; Davidson 1979:65). One may assert that Sarah’s getting too old to conceive made her temporarily skeptical to God’s promise in this scene. The larger context, however, also depicts her as being skeptical.

### 4.3.1 Characterization of Sarah within the Larger Context

In an earlier episode (Gn 16:1-6), Sarai states the reason for her barrenness: "The Lord has kept me from having children" (Gn 16:2). The idea is that God is the one who gives or denies conception (cf. Gn 20:18; 25:21; Lv 20:20, 21; Dt 28:11; Ps 113:9; 127:3; Is 6:9; cf. Wenham 1994:7; Von Rad 1972:191; Harris et al 1980; Hamilton 1976:443; Wenham 1994:74; Botterweck at al 1974). The tendency in Sarah's giving the reason for her barrenness seems to be blaming the Lord instead of attributing it to her own unbelief (cf. Sarna 1989:119). Sarah proposed to Abraham to sleep with her servant Hagar by making her a surrogate mother. Her saying shows her state of mind of being unwilling to wait upon the favor of God, who has the sovereignty to make her conceive (Gn 25:21; 30:2; Lv 20:20, 21; Dt 28:11; Ps 113:9; 127:3; cf. Wenham 1994:7; Von Rad 1972:191).

The result of her suggestion caused a family conflict between Sarai and Abram (Gn 16:4-5). Sarai got the concession from Abraham to treat Hagar as she thinks best (bAJåh;, "the good"; cf. Mathews 1996:187; Hartley 1995:165). Sarah did not control her jealousy against Hagar and mistreated her so badly that she fled (Gn 16 and 21:8-21; Wenham 1994:8, 82; Hartley 1995:165). The Hebrew verb hn[ (*ana*, "oppress," "afflict," "mistreat," "punish" ) depicts "harsh and cruel treatment" with excessive severity, which reminds of the terrible conditions of slavery that the Israelites suffered in Egypt (Gn 15:13; Ex 1:12; cf. Hartley 1995:166; Hamilton 1976:448; Sarna 1989:119; Skinner 1980:286; Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980). Thus the verb implies that Sarai subjected Hagar to physical and psychological abuse (cf, Sarna 1989:120; Hartley 1995:166).

Sarah is again depicted negatively after the birth of Isaac (Gn 21:8-14). Sarah's

attitude against Hagar and her son Ishmael functions as a source of grief for Abraham (Gn 21:8-12; cf. Morris 1976:368). Sarah's harsh manner against Hagar is contrasted to the Lord's comforting and merciful care of her (Gn 16:7-14; 21:17-21; Wenham 1994:11; Hartley 1995:166; Westermann 1985:250). Sarah is depicted as one getting easily angered, jealous, insistent, unforgiving, and skeptical to trust in God's promise, and prone to making mistakes like that of Eve (Gn 16:1-6; 18:12-15; 21:8-10; cf. Gaebelein 1976:134). Thus the characterization of Sarah within the larger context also is depicted as unbelieving and negative as in the second scene here (Gn 18:9-15).

### 4.3.2 The Theological Significance of Sarah's Skeptical Laughter

The motive for Sarah's skeptical laughter and the Lord' reaction to her negative response is used by the narrator to express his theological view (cf. Venter 2006:13; Knight 2004:171; Speiser 1964:130; Skinner 1980:302; Wenham 1994b: 49; Venter 2006:12; Sailhamer 1976:148; Hamilton 1995:13). Sarah's words to herself: "Will I now have this pleasure?" might be the exact reason for her laughter. For hn"ëd>[, (*ednah*, "luxury," "dainty," "delight" ) implies that she will recover the joy of sexual intercourse (cf. Skinner 1980:302; Sarna 1989:130; Sailhamer 1976:147; Harris et al 1980; Botterweck et al 1974; Mathews 1996:218; Brown 1979). It means that physically Sarah has already become unable to conceive (Gn17:17; 18:11; cf. Driver 1904:194; Skinner 1980:302; Sailhamer 1976:147-148; Hamilton 1995b:12). Thus her advanced age might have provoked such a reaction of laughter (Gn 17:17; 18:11; cf. Jamieson et al 1990:29; Westermann 1985:280-281; Bush 1981:290).

According to ordinary human thinking, the promise announced here truly is nonsensical (cf. Bruegemann 1982:159). But the Lord rebuked Sarah in an angered and

daunting tone of voice (cf. Gunkel 1997:197; Hartley 1995:179; Westermann 1985:281; Hamilton 1995:13; Kidner 1967:132). The overwhelming question of the Lord: “Is anything impossible (too hard) for the Lord? (Gn 18:14; cf. Bruegemann 1982:159) instructs Sarah that the Lord is omnipotent (v 11; cf. Ps 139:6; Jr 32:17,27; cf. Keil 1996:146; Wenham 1994:49; Skinner 1980:302; Keil 1996: 146; Harris et al 1980).

The author is skillful to get across his theological view to his readers by using specific clue words. The author keeps repeating the clue word qxc (“laugh”): “Sarah laughed” (Gn 18:12); “Why did Sarah laugh” (Gn 18:13); “I did not laugh”; “Yes, you did laugh.” The clue word is pronounced four times, once in the mouth of the narrator, twice in the mouth of the Lord, and once in the mouth of Sarah in this dialogue (cf. Wenham 1994: 49; Mathews 1996:219; Hartley 1995:180).

The author highlights the term because the child’s name will also be a word play on the term “laugh” as he will be called Isaac, i.e., “laughter” (Gn 17:19; Hartley 1995:180; Roof 1987:138). Even her telling a lie “I did not laugh” pronounces the name of her future son “Isaac” (qx'_c.yI “he laughs”; cf. Wenham 1994b: 49; Mathews 1996:219). The divine emphatic rejoinder “Yes, you did laugh” also indicates the future son’s name (cf. Mathews 1996:219). Sarah’s skeptical laughing may denote a mixed feeling of surprise, doubt, and awkward joy, but obviously the laughing indicates the name of Isaac as the prolepsis (cf. Sarna 1989:126; Skinner 1980:301-302; Wenham 1994:48; Westermann 1985:268; Sailhamer 1976:147).

Even though the covenant partners laughed skeptically about the incredulous birth announcement of the Lord (Gn 17:17; 18:12; cf. Wenham 1994:26), the Lord will turn her earlier laughter of disbelief into joy (Gn 21:6; Hartley 1995:199). This literary skill of the narrator attests that the birth of Isaac was not caused by the meritorious

works of a human covenant partner but only by the faithfulness of the Lord.

### 4.3.3 Theological Significance of the Lord's Return (bWv shuv)

The annunciation of the birth within a set time "I will return (bAvå) to you about this time next year, and your wife Sarah will have a son" is repeated two times in this second scene (Gn 18:10a, 14b). The phrase "at this time next year" (hY"ëx; t[eäK') (Gn 18:10a, 14b) was used in Genesis 17:21 for the first time (cf. 2 Ki 4:16). This repeated phrase is significant because it indicates the Lord's sincere pathos to fulfill His promise (cf. Hayes and Holladay 2007:93; Wenham 1994:48; Venter 2005:4, 7). The general idea of the verb bWv ("return") with God as subject is also for the sake of showing favor in a covenant context (cf. Gn 18:10, 14; 50:24-25; Ex 13:19; Ps 80:14-15; Is 23:17; Jr 15:15; 2 Chr 30:6; Zch 1:3; Ml 3:7; cf. Brown 1979; Hamilton 1995:12; Wenham 1994:48; Botterweck et al 1974; Harris et al 1980). The term bWv ("return") here (Gn 18:10, 14) is interpreted as the efficient fulfillment of the promise of seed by God's spiritual return to the earth (cf. Bush 1981:289; Sarna 1989:130).

The author describes the birth of the promised child in Genesis 21:1 as the result of the Lord's gracious visit (dq:ïP') that keeps His promise to Sarah (cf. Tenney 1977; Hartley 1995:180; Mathews 1996:266). The term dq:ïP' ("visit") is a substitute for bWv ("return") in the fulfillment part of the narrative (G 21:1-2). In other words, the term dq:ïP' ("visit"; Gn 21:1) is used as an alternative to bWv ("return"; Gn 18:10) bearing the nuance of the divine presence to Abraham and Sarah (cf. Hamilton 1995:12). The nuance of the Hebrew verb dqP ("to visit," "to attend," or "to be gracious"; Gn 21:1) is significant, for it denotes redemptive intervention by the Lord, which produces a beneficial result (Gn 50:24-25; Ex 3:16; 4:31; Rt 1:6; Ps 8:4; cf. Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980; Sarna 1989:145; Hartley 1995:198; Wenham 1994:79-80).

The word has the connotation of Yahweh's merciful act of deliverance of a person from an apparently hopeless situation of infertility (cf. 1 Sm 2:21; Lk 1:68; Hamilton 1976:72-73; Sarna 1989:145; Mathews 1996:266). Thus, all the parallels that use the word bWv ("return") or dqP ("visit") attest to the fact that the birth of Isaac was given not as reward of the meritorious works of human, but as the gracious redemptive act of the Lord in accordance with His promise.

#### 4.3.3.1 Should Isaac's Birth be Understood as Getting a Reward?

Scholars who praise Abraham's hospitable manner have a general tendency to interpret Abraham's receiving the promised son as the reward for his hospitality (see ch.2). A few scholars assert that the receiving of Isaac is a result of the Lord's covenantal faithfulness to keep His promise (Gn 17:17; 18:13, 15; cf. Sailhamer 1990:148; Ross 1988:345-346; Hartley 1995:173).

Readers must pay attention to the way the author describes the birth of Isaac in the following narrative. The author describes the birth of Isaac as the act of God by Sarah's mouth: "God has brought me laughter" (Gn 21:6a; cf. Saihamer 1976:148). In other words, the Lord made the laugh of unbelief into that of joy, "Isaac" (Gn 21:1-7; Hartley 1995:199). The Lord's giving a son to the skeptical Sarah is showing His faithfulness that never changes his plan (cf. Westermann 1985:282; Calvin 1965:468; Fretheim 1983:98; Chisholom 2006:97). The birth of Isaac was the result of the Lord's unilateral strong will to produce his holy seed regardless of the lacking faith of Sarah (cf. Jarick 2000:84: Bush 1981:290; Wenham 1994:48; Westermann 1985:280-281; Davidson 1979:65).

Abraham became a coward not having strong trust in God during his sojourn in

Egypt (Gn 12:10-20; see ch.2.3.6). Abram's cowered conduct of telling a lie to Pharaoh, ethically speaking, was apparently a wrong doing by Abraham (cf. Von Rad 1972:169; Sarna 1989:103; Westermann 1985:207; Sailhamer 1976:121). He should have trusted God to save him, but he did not (cf. Sarna 1989:95). In this event the promise of abundant seed through Sarai was placed in jeopardy, but the Lord does not allow his work to miscarry but rescues it and preserves it beyond all human failure (cf. Gn 12:14-20; Von Rad 1972:169; Hartley 1995:139). The narrative (Gn 12:10-20) conveys a message that Abram's blessing does not depend on his conduct, but on God's special favor of those whom He chose (cf. Mathews 1996:122). One may get the same message from Sarah's experience in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15) and the fulfillment episode (Gn 21:1-7).

Receiving a child is usually the result of God's healing of barrenness (cf. Gn 20:17) or God's merciful answering to the faithful prayers of his covenant partners (Gn 25:21). Therefore, the barren matriarch's receiving of a child must be understood as a gift of God (Gn 25:21; 30:17; 1 Sm 1:12; cf. Wenham 1994:117; Gibson 1982:137; Bowie 1978:664; Keiser 1979:89).

### 4.3.4 Summary

**Plot Structure**

This narrative unit was not developed to the common pattern of annunciation stories, for it loses the fulfillment part the story (cf. 2 Ki 4:8-17; 1 Sm 1:1-20). However, it stimulates readers to have interest of a plot development reaching to Genesis 21:1-7 that ranges beyond the inserted episodes (cf. Gn 18:16-20:18).

**Characterization of Abraham**

The first interrogation “Where is your wife Sarah?” (Gn 18:9a) is generally understood as a rhetorical device to open up a purposeful conversation to solve human troubles (cf. Gn 3:9; 4:9; 16:8). The focus of camera seems to turn to Sarah here, but Abraham is depicted as the more favored one than Sarah, since the Lord keeps delivering messages to Abraham (Gn 18:10, 13-14). Throughout the Abraham narrative, the Lord does not talk to Sarah in person but keeps talking to Abraham only. The Lord keeps a distance from Sarah like “the angel of the Lord” who keeps evading his direct appearance to Manoah (cf. Jdg 13:3, 8-9).

Abraham’s simple answer: “There, in the tent,” to the question of the Lord presents determinative elements to characterize Abraham. The author describes Abraham’s superior spiritual awareness to that of Sarah (Gn 18:9-15). If the visitors were ordinary human beings, the question, “Where is your wife Sarah?” would have been a daring question. But Abraham had already recognized their divinity at the initial encounter, so that he does not have any offended feelings. The nuance of the Lord’s question is rather authoritative dealing with an inferior human covenant partner. A simple and immediate answer without any offended feelings implies that Abraham stands before the Lord.

Abraham’s silent attitude in this scene may be understood significantly.

Firstly, it shows the proper attitude for one who receives the message of the Lord. The author seems to have a constant awareness that Abraham stands in the presence of the Lord. Such a listening posture is usually depicted with the phrase “to stand before Yahweh” (Dt 4:10; 19:17; Jr 7:10; 15:1). His silence shows his characterization in a significant way (Gn 18:9-15).

Secondly, it seems to depict Abraham’s cautious observing attitude. When it

comes to dealing with Sarah's obstinacy in the matter of her barrenness, Abraham was passive (Gn 16:1-6). Abraham seems to observe in silence how the Lord deals with his skeptical and obstinate wife expecting some good results.

Thirdly, it seems to depict Abraham's empathetic listening attitude. Sarah's skeptical laughing apparently echoes Abraham's former laughing (Gn 17:17), which may denote a mixed feeling of surprise, doubt, and awkward joy. If Sarah's laughing was a big mistake before the Lord, then Abraham is the accomplice of the mistake. Abraham seems to be corrected together with Sarah again here by the Lord in his silent standing posture.

**Characterization of Sarah (Gn 18:9-15):**

Sarah's thoughts of incredulity provoked two rhetorical questions of the Lord: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gn 18:13-14a). The question indicates Sarah's apparent lack of faith in God's omniscience and omnipotence as Creator. The larger context also depicts Sarah as being skeptical and making a mistake like that of Eve (Gn 16:1-6). Sarah is also depicted as one getting easily angered, jealous, insistent, and unforgiving (Gn 16:1-6; 18:12-15; 21:8-10).

**The Theological Significance of Sarah's Skeptical Laughter:**

The motive for Sarah's skeptical laughter and the Lord' reaction to such negative response is used by the narrator to express his theological view. The author keeps repeating the clue word qxc ("laugh") four times (Gn 18:12; 18:13, 15). The author highlights the term foreshadowing the birth of "Isaac" (qx'_c.yI "he laughs"). Even though the covenant partners laugh skeptically about the incredulous birth (Gn 17:17;

18:12), the Lord turns her earlier laughter of disbelief into joy (Gn 21:6). This literary skill attests that the birth of Isaac was not caused by the meritorious works of a human covenant partner but only by the faithfulness of the Lord.

**Theological Significance of the Lord's Return (bWv shuv):**

The annunciation of the birth within a set time "I will return (bAvå) to you about this time next year, and your wife Sarah will have a son" is repeated two times in this second scene (Gn 18:10a, 14b; cf. Gn 17:21). This repeated phrase is significant because it indicates the Lord's sincere pathos to fulfill His promise. The general idea of the verb bWv ("return") with God as subject is also for the sake of showing favor in a covenant context (cf. Gn 18:10, 14; 50:24-25). The term bWv ("return") here (Gn 18:10, 14) is interpreted as the efficient fulfillment of the promise of seed by God's spiritual return to the earth.

Thus the use of the word bWv ("return") attest to the fact that the birth of Isaac was given not as reward of the meritorious works of human, but as the gracious redemptive act of the Lord. Sarah's word of confession attests it again: "God has brought me laughter" (Gn 21:6a). In other words, the Lord made the laugh of unbelief into that of joy, "Isaac" (Gn 21:1-7). Receiving a child is usually the result of God's healing of barrenness answering to the faithful prayers of his covenant partners (Gn 20:17; 25:21; 30:17; 1 Sm 1:12).

**4.4 Underlying Motif of the Great Delay of Fulfillment of the Promised Son (Gn 18:9-15)**

The report on the barrenness of Sarai seems to be introduced as the background

of Abraham's calling in the account of Terah (Gn 11:27-32; cf. Wenham 1987:267; Tenney 1977). This form of narrative plot seems to show a dire need for God's intervention to deliver the procreation crisis that fell even on Shem's tribe (Gn 11:30; cf. Wolf 1991:23). The whole Abraham narrative tells many episodes about how Abraham and Sarah wished to receive offspring desperately (cf. Wenham 1987:273; Gibson 1981:213; Sarna 1989:87).There is, however, a great delay in the fulfillment of this promise (Gn 12:4; 16:16; 17:1; 18:11; cf. Wenham 1987:273).

The issue of barrenness of the matriarchs is a continual theological theme throughout the Old Testament (cf. Jdg 13:2-3; I Sm 1:2-8; Is 54:1; cf. Wenham 1987:273). This work expects that the underlying motive of the great delay will help to understand the theological significance of the barrenness. This work attempts to detect any clue of underlying motive from the depiction of the narrative itself. This work expects that inter-textual study on passages dealing with barren matriarchs might enable us to detect some interrelated common reasons for barrenness (cf. Chisholm 2006:79).

### 4.4.1 The Motif of Giving a New Name

The main concern here is to understand the motive of giving new names to the covenant partners. In the second scene (Gn 18:9-15), the visitors call the wife of Abraham by her new name Sarah (Gn 18:9a; cf. Gn 17:19, 21) and gives reconfirmation of the promised son with a set date of the birth of the promised son (Gn 17:21; 18:10, 14; cf. Hartley 1995:174). Sarah is the first barren matriarch in Genesis (cf. Wenham 1987:273; Hamilton 1976:72-74; Mathews 1996:265-267; Mathews 1996:101-102). When the Lord changes her old name Sarai into Sarah (Gn 17:15-16) together with the promise, her new destiny is linked with her new name as a symbol of God's blessing (cf.

Hartley 1995:173; Roop 1987:123). God's act of giving new names to the covenant partners is repeated within the patriarchal narratives (Gn 16:11; 17:4, 15, 19; 32:28), by which the author seems to present a significant motif in each episode. Receiving a new name is understood as God's token of firm assurance to bless his covenant partners as well as the token of the exerting of God's sovereignty (cf. Gn 2:20; 2 Ki 23:34; 24:17; Sarna 1989:121; Skinner 1980:287; Wenham 1994:10, 19; Hartley 1995:166; Mathews 1996:202). Then, one may imagine the old name "Sarai" to indicate something bad. Sarah's old name may be a clue to the reason for her barrenness.

Sarah's old name yr;f' (Sarai: princess) is generally understood as derived from the name Sharratu, of the pantheon of Haran, the title of the moon-goddess, the wife of moon god Sin (cf. Simpson 1978:568-569; Sarna 1989:87; Wenham 1987:273; Mathews 1996:101; Hartley 1995:131; Wikipedia: 2009). Human names in ancient days used to denote the religion they belong to (cf. Freedman 1992; Jamieson et al 1990:22).

It indicates that Terah's family was once involved in moon worship. A narration in the book of Joshua attests this idol worship background: "Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods" (Jos 24:2; cf. Lasor 1996:45).

It is attested also by the archeological findings that Ur of the Chaldeans and Haran was the great center of northern Mesopotamia, and there was a popular cult of the lunar god (cf. Botterweck et al 1974; Tenney 1977; Gunkel 1997:162; Skinner 1980:237; Westermann 1985:138; Mathews 1996:101; Hartley 1995:131). Changing the old names of covenant partners into new ones is understood as an indication of God's active decision to change their sinfulness and cursed destinies of paganism into godly and blessed ones in the Book of Genesis (cf. Gn 17:5-6, 15-16; 32:28; Skinner

1980:292; Hartley 1995:173; Wenham 1994:296-297; Mathews 1996:205).

Therefore, this work asserts that Sarah's idol-worship-background is one of the main reasons for her barrenness and the great delay. Therefore, Sarai, the idol-worship-background name, needed to be changed to heal Sarah's barrenness. This work expects that inter-textual studies on the parallels of barren matriarchs may give some common reasons for such a great delay (Gn 11:30; 25:21-26; 30:1-24; Jdg 13; 1 Sm 1:1-20; cf. Mathews 1996:101-102).

### 4.4.2 Reason for a Great Delay by Inter-textual Study of Parallels; Gn 25:19-26; 30:1-24; Jdg 13)

The author of the book of Genesis explains that the increased wickedness of human beings caused their shortened life span (Gn 3:17-19; 6:1-8; cf. Dt 28:18, 53-57; Wenham 1987:142, 270; Simpson 1978:534). The genealogies of Shem and Terah (Gn 11:10-32) show a drastic reduction in the duration of life and a procreation crisis, which is the barrenness of matriarch (Gn 12:30; cf. Sarna 1989:84-85). Readers may find traces of such evil in other matriarchal narratives paralleling Sarah's procreation crisis.

(1) Concerning Rebekah's barrenness (Gn 25:19-26), there is no exact description of the reason of her barrenness. What readers know is that Rebekah was from Haran the city of Nahor, who was the brother of Abraham (Gn 27:43; 28:10; 29:4; cf. Westarmann 1985:140). The mother of Rebecha was Milcah. The etymology of Milcah is understood as coming from Malkatu the princess goddess, the name of one of the gods of the pantheon of Haran who was known as the daughter of Sharratu (cf. Simpson 1978:568-569; Westarmann 1985:138; Skinner 1980:237; Wenham 1987:273; Hartley 1995:131; Botterweck et al 1974). These facts are relevant to what the

Scriptural tradition reports in Joshua 24:2 about the religious background in Haran (cf. Mathews 1996:100-101,499). The Deuteronomist asserts that barrenness is one of the results of disobedience to the commandments of the Lord (Dt 28:18, 53-57; cf. Merrill 1994:352-358). Then, one may assume that Rebekah also was associated with such a pagan atmosphere in her home place.

(2) Rachel blamed her husband for her barrenness (Gn 30:1-2): Jacob's response to Rachel's protest tells that God is the one who closed her womb and God is the one who will open it (Gn 30:2). To blame her husband for Rachel's barrenness smacks of impiety from her side, for the Old Testament regards children as the gift of God, not of man (cf. Ps 113:9; Wenham 1994:244). The reason for Rachel's barrenness also seems to be related to idol worship in her hometown. For it is written (Gn 31:19): "When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods (*teraphim*; Gn 31:19)." According to Nuzi practice `~ypir'T.` (*teraphim*: "household gods") are identified with household gods that were involved with "inheritance right" or were used for divination in a pagan society (cf. Wenham 1994:273-274; Simpson 1978:713; Botterweck et al 1974:779-780). Her father's name was Laban and this can also could be a clue to idol worship, for Laban is from "*lebana*" that denotes "white," the color of the moon (Dt 4:19; 17:3; Job 31: 26-28; cf. Tenney 1977). The fact that Jacob's family had to break away from the strange gods they brought from Mesopotamia strongly supports such paganism (Gn 35:2; cf. Lasor 1996:46; Wolf 1991:121). Therefore, this work asserts that Rachel's attachment to these idols illustrates the strong influence of paganism upon Laban's family (cf. Wolf 1991:121).

(3) The reason for the barrenness of the mother of Samson also may be interpreted in relationship with the sin of idolatry during her days. According to the

author's compilation of Samson's narrative, the barrenness of the wife of Manoah is written in tandem with the apostasy of all of the Israelites in the opening narration (Jdg 13:1-5). The introductory narration explains the apostasy of the Israelites as the reason for the nationwide oppression for forty years (cf. Jdg 13:1-5; Martin 1975:155): "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah … had a wife who was sterile and remained childless (Jdg 13:1-5). The narrator explains the meaning of "doing of evil" as the Canaanized cultic practices (idol worship) as follows: "Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord … They followed and worshiped various gods of peoples around them … they … served Baal and the Ashtoreths (Jdg 2:11-12)."

The name Samson (`!Av+m.vi`) also denotes some links with the solar cult of the time: Samson means "little sun" or "like the sun" as the diminutive of `vm,v,Þ` (*Shemesh*) sun god. The place name *Beth-Shemesh* ("house of *Shemesh*) recalls the existence of sanctuaries dedicated to the sun god (1 Sm 6:9; cf. Block 1999:417; Botterweck et al 1974). The motif of barrenness of the wife of Manoah seems to echo that of Sarai, since its vocabulary and its redundancy in both depictions are similar to each other (Jdg 13:2; Gn 11:30; cf. Block 1999:400; Klein 1983:4; Olson 1994:845):

`dl'(w" Hl'Þ !yaeî hr'_q'[] yr;Þf' yhiîT.w:` "And Sarai was barren; she had no child"

`hd'l'(y" al{ïw> hr'Þq'[] ATïv.aiw>` "And his wife was barren, and bare not".

These are the apparent textual evidences that attest that even Samson's parents were

affected by Canaanized cultic practices (cf. Block 1999:416-417). In Israel worship of the sun was strictly forbidden (Dt 4:19), but unfortunately sun worship entered Israel at various times (2 Ki 23:11; Ezk 8:16-17; Harris et al 1980). In the Old Testament barrenness was the sign of divine reproach and displeasure and was understood as one of the many curses on those who disobey the Lord's command (Dt 7:13-14; 28:18; Ps 107:34; 127; 128; cf. Block 1999:400-401; Merrill 1994:352-358; Caird 1978:879). Thus, the reason of barrenness of the wife of Manoah may be understood as one of the results of nationwide apostasy of the Israelites.

Such information about the pagan cultic background of the trio matriarchs apparently attests that their procreation crisis (barrenness) was linked to the sin of idol worship. The penalty for the sin of idol worship is putting one to death (Dt 17:6; 2 Ki 23:5; cf. Tenney 1977). Then readers find the great mercifulness (or covenantal faithfulness) of God in molding a new holy nation from such a sinful people who are contaminated by idolatry (Dt 4:15-31; 7:1-16). Matriarchs as part of the new holy nation are therefore explicitly the favored ones by the Lord.

### 4.4.3 Other Reasons for the Great Delay in the Fulfillment of the Promised Son

One may presume that the fact that Abraham married his half-sister was the reason for Sarah's barrenness causing the great delay (cf. Gn 20:12; Sarna 1989:143). Leviticus 20:20-21shows that childlessness is the penalty for some types of incest (cf. Wenham 1994:74). And certain forms of endogamy was condemned and forbidden as abhorrent thing in the Pentateuch (Lv 18:9, 11 20:17; Dt 27:22; Ezk 22:11; cf. Sarna 1989:143; Von Rad 1972:227; Mathews 1996:257). But the author of the book of Genesis reports endogamy as socially common practice in the patriarchs' era: Nahor

married his niece Milcah; Isaac married Rebekah, his second cousin; and Jacob married the sisters, Leah and Rachel, who were his cousins (cf. Sarna 1989:143; Mathews 1996:257). Four of them suffered the same barrenness, thus, barrenness was a recurrent theme in the consecutive matriarchs' story (cf. Wenham 1994:175, 244).

But the author does not condemn such an ancient endogamy tradition in any apparent written descriptions in the Abraham narrative (cf. Von Rad 1972:227; Sarna 1989:143; Westermann 1985:326). The author rather puts emphasis on it that Abraham's descendant must marry within the Shemite people, and never be mingled with the Canaanites by telling the stories of Abraham, Rebekah, and Isaac (Gn 24:3-4; 26:34-35; 27:46; 28:2; Dt 7:3-4; cf. Kuschel 1995:14). The Lord reveals his determined plan that Isaac who is born from Sarah must become a legal covenant child in Genesis 17:19 (cf. Ezr 10:1-44; Gunkel 1994:116). Then, Abraham's marriage to his stepsister may hardly become a reason of the great delay.

One may think that the delayed fulfillment was caused by the moral immaturity of Sarah. Sarai mistreated the pregnant Hagar harshly without any mercy (Gn 16:6; cf. Gn 21:8-21; cf. Jeansonne 1990:18-21; Hartley 1995:165). Sarah demonstrates her moral immaturity again even after the birth of Isaac, for she asked Abraham to drive out Hagar and his son without mercy (Gn 21:8-21; cf. Von Rad 1972:232-233; Sarna 1989:146). Should the Lord wait until the moral behavior of the covenant partners become matured enough to meet God's standard of moral righteousness? She told a lie in the presence of the Lord in the second scene (Gn 18:15). Speiser (1964:131) says that Sarah made the down-to-earth fault by telling a lie in the presence of the Lord (Gn 18:12-15).

Should we understand her telling a lie as an immoral lie? But the narrator gives

the motivation for Sarah's telling a lie in a sympathetic tone as follows: "She was afraid, so she lied." Sarah is afraid of the Lord because she knows that her thoughts are exposed to the omniscient God (cf. Westermann 1985:282; Hamilton 1995:14; Hartley 1995:179-180). She realizes that she has challenged the authenticity of a divine promise (cf. Hamilton 1995:14). Therefore, Sarah's denial is rather an attempt to withdraw her laughter when she became aware of her un-proper attitude (cf. Westermann 1985:282). Thus, her motive of telling a lie is understood rather as a psychological one because she was afraid of acting in the same way Abraham did to Pharaoh and Abimelech (Gn 3:3ff; 12:13, 19; 20:11; Mathews 1996:219; Hartley 1995:180; Sailhamer 1976:148; Von Rad 1972:207).

Moral immaturity could be one of the many probable reasons for the great delay of the fulfillment of God's promise. The Lord, however, announces his determined plan to fulfill his promise in the second scene regardless of Sarah's weak faith and her telling a lie (Gn 18:9-15). Thus, Sarah's moral shortcoming does not seem to be the major reason for the great delay. What could be a more probable reason for this great delay?

#### 4.4.3.1 Sin of Doubt is the Underlying Motive of Great Delay

In the second scene (Gn 18:9-15), the author explains Sarah's biological impossibility of becoming pregnant (Gn 18:11). Sarah became very discouraged as she grew older, but she was apparently challenged to have faith in the Almighty God in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15; cf. 2 Ki 4:8-17; cf. Chisholm 2006:35; Jamieson et al 1990:29; Brueggemann 1982:158). Ross (1988:345) asserts, "Basically the passage forms an exhortation for the covenant people to believe that God can do the impossible. The promise to Sarah was the annunciation of an impossible birth." According to

human reason, the promise announced here seems to be nonsensical, but their world of barrenness is going to be shattered by the divine possibility that lies outside the reasonable expectation of Sarah (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158).

Thus, the main theme of the dialogue in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15) is to encourage Sarah to have "faith" in the promise of the Almighty God. Mathews (1996:218) asserts that the Lord's promise is deterred not by Sarah's being too old, but by Sarah's doubt in the promise. This view is grounded on what the author presents in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15). Thus, the skeptical character for Sarah may become the major reason for the great delay of the fulfillment.

#### 4.4.3.2 Sin of Doubt in the Larger Context

In the episodes of Genesis 16, Sarah apparently revealed her doubt in the promise of God (cf. Westermann 1985:281; Hamilton 1995:12-13; Bruegemann 1982:158; Sarna 1989:119). Sarah proposed that Abraham sleep with Hagar to make her a surrogate mother. Such proposal was a perfectly proper action according to Near East custom. But the nuance of her proposal seems to show her mind of relinquishment to wait for the favor of God, who holds sovereignty to make her conceive (Gn 25:21; 30:2; Lv 20:20, 21; Dt 28:11; Ps 113:9; 127:3; cf. Wenham 1994:7; Von Rad 1972:191). Even further, the author's narrative skill seems to echo the first woman's sin of doubting the first command of the Lord he gave to Adam and Eve indicating a great mistake (Gn 2:17; 3:1-6; Wenham 1994:7; Sarna 1988:119; Mathews 1996:178; Von Rad 1972:208; Sailhamer 1976:134-135; Morris 1976:329; Hartley 1995:165; Westermann 1985:236). The wordings may be compared as follows:

Eve's suggestion of eating to Adam (Gn 3:1-7)

rm,aTo'w: (and said; Gn 3:2): "The woman said to the serpent"

xQ;úTiw: (and took; Gn 3:6a): "She took some and ate it"

!TEïTiw: (and gave; Gn 3:6b): "She also gave some to her husband"

Sarah's suggestion of Concubinage to Abraham (Gn 16:2-3)

rm,aTo'w (Said; Gn 16:2); "She *said* to Abraham"

xQ;úTiw (Took; Gn 16:3): "Sarah his *wife took* her Egyptian maidservant Hagar"

!TEïTiw: (Gave; Gn 16:3): "*Gave* her to her husband"

The wording of Sarai's proposal to Abraham: "and she took" (xQ;úTiw:) and "and she gave" (!TEïTiw:) seems to suggest the narrator's disapproval of this act, for it echoes the same wording of Genesis 3:6, "and she took (xQ:ïTiw:) and "and she gave" (!TEôTiw:, cf. Wenham 1994:7). By this depiction the author seems to depict Sarah's character as another Eve, who commits the same sin of doubting (Gn 3:6, cf, Mathews 1996:185; Hartley 1995:165; Westermann 1985:239; Von Rad 1972:208). She attempts to achieve God's blessings by the customary way of that era doubting the word of the Lord (cf. Sailhamer 1976:134-135; Morris 1976:329; Hartley 1995:165; Westermann 1985:236; Mathews 1996:178).

Sarah also blames Abraham for the regretting outcome of the events in the same way the first woman blamed the serpent for the shameful result of eating the forbidden fruits (Gn 3:13-14; Wenham 1994:8; Mathews 1996:186). After this mistake and the birth of Ishmael the Lord did not speak to Abraham for thirteen years (Gn 16:16; 17:1a).

It means that the promise of Isaac was delayed for a long period. This work asserts that the depiction (Gn 16:16; 17:1a) is the very textual proof to explain the reason for the great delay.

#### 4.4.3.3 Great Delay was Necessary?

The Lord has been repeating his promise throughout the whole Abraham narrative (Gn 12:2, 7; 13:15-16; 15:4-6; 17:16; cf. Sailhamer 1976:149). There is a developmental line in the characterization of the covenant partners (cf. Gunkel 1994:37-45). Each episode seems to show a gradual progress in the faith of the covenant partners. God's promise had been confronted by Abraham's severe circumstances right from the beginning of the Abraham narrative (Gn 12:10-20; cf. Lasor 1996:47). The Lord encourages Abraham by giving his word of reconfirmation each time during an acute crisis and in a situation of discouragement (cf. Gn 13:14-17; 15:2-5; 17:17-19; 26:20, 21, 22; Ex 17:2,7, Nm 20:3,13; cf. Sarna 1989:98-99, 113; Mathews 1996:133-139, 166; Williamson 2000:65; Sailhamer 1976:127; Hamilton 1976:423).

Is the gradual progress of the covenant partners' faith required consecutively to see the fulfillment of God's promise? In a sense, the great delay may be understood as a necessary process for his covenant partners to grow (cf. Sarna 1989:179). The following research on "how the barren matriarchs could be freed from barrenness" may show the more apparent common views on this matter.

### 4.4.4 How Matriarchs were freed from Barrenness

(1) Rebekah: Isaac prayed on behalf of his barren wife Rebekah for twenty years for the healing of her barrenness (Gn 25:20-21, 26; cf. 15:2-6; 20:17; 21:1-2; Wenham

1994:175). Such prolonged barrenness of Rebekah may be compared with the case of Sarah (cf. Skinner 1980:358). It took Isaac a long period to get an answer for his prayer. Therefore, his act of prayer rt[ (*atar*), which emphasizes its fervency, is understood as a persistent and urgent prayer for getting alleviation of Rebekah's affliction (cf. Ex 8:30; 10:18; Hamilton 1955:176; Wenham 1994:117; Hartley 1995:235; Botterweck 2001). Isaac's act of prayer to the Lord on behalf of Rebekah was the only way to turn her barrenness into the blessing of being pregnant (cf. Gibson 1982:137; Bowie 1978:664).

(2) Rachel: She had suffered barrenness for quite a long period and also prayed to the Lord: "Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace (Gn 30:22-23)." The phrase ~yhiÞl{a/ rKoðz>YIw: ("and God remembered") is significant, for it means a focusing upon the object of memory that results in the action of giving a gracious answer to prayer (cf. Gn 8:1; 19:29; Ex 2:24; Sarna 1989:56, 210; Mathews 2005:490). It implies that Rachel continued her petitions for a child and the Lord heard her prayers (cf. Mathews 2005:490). Thus, faithful prayer was the way to be freed from barrenness. Therefore, children for the barren matriarchs were not the result of their own procreative ability but the special gift granted by God (cf. Ps 127:3-5; Pr 17:6; Bowie 1978:704).

(3) Wife of Manoah: According to the Judges cycle often repeated in the book of Judges, the Lord each time raises a Judge as the answer to the crying prayers of the Israelites who suffer under the oppression of their enemies (Jdg 3:7-11; 4:3; 6:6; 10:10; cf. Block 1999:395; Olson 1994:845; Lindars 1995:99). Therefore, one may assert that the Lord raised Samson as the answer to the prayer of all the Israelites.

(4) Hannah: Her plight was the same as that of Sarah, and she suffered so bitterly

from her barrenness that she prayed fervently to the Lord, making a strong vow of devotion to the Lord if only she can have a son (1 Sm 1:10-20; cf. Gn 16; 21; cf. Lasor 1996:168; Bergen 1996:68-69). The Lord raised the great Judge Samuel as the answer to the crying prayer of a pious woman (cf. Klein 1985:11). The child was given a name intended to memorialize Hannah's bold faith and the Lord's gracious hearing of her prayer (laeWmv.: "his name is El," cf. Bergen 1996:71). In Exodus 23:25-26, the Lord says, "Worship the Lord your God ... I will take away sickness from among you, and non will miscarry or be barren in your land." The Lord is the one who definitely heals the sickness of being barren. Hannah's outpouring heartfelt prayer reminds one of the strong statements of the Lord made about right worship: "Server the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Dt 10:12; Merrill 1994:201).

(5) Sarah: Abraham was the one who prayed for his seed (Gn 15:2-6).The author's narration about the healing of barrenness is significant: "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah" (Gn 20:17-18). Here the author depicts the blessed role of Abraham in whom all the peoples of the earth will be blessed, and it connotes that the birth of Isaac follows upon the prayer of Abraham (Gn 12:3; 18:18; cf. Gn 14:11-24; Wenham 1994:74-75). The author emphasizes the simple essence of his theology that the Lord is the one who heals the barrenness of a woman in response to the prayer of the prophet Abraham (Gn 20:7, 17; cf. Von Rad 1972:230; Hamilton 1976:71; Westermann 1985:328).

Therefore, Sailhamer (1976:182) asserts that the author keeps repeating the essence of his message that the promised seed of Abraham is to be accomplished not by

human meritorious acts or by futile human efforts but by the special act of God in response to the right expression of faith through heartfelt prayer. What is significant is that all the seeds (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, and Samuel) given to prayerful parents play important roles in the salvation history of Israel (cf. Klein 1983:4).

One may ask what the author's theological motif was for presenting covenantal descendants or deliverers (Judges) as being born by barren women. Does it demonstrate God's miraculous ability or does it show another purpose?

### 4.4.5 Theological Motif of Emphasizing Miraculous Births

Even though the promise was delayed for so long, the Lord rejected Abraham's consideration to Eliezer of Damamcus as his legal heir (Gn 15:2-5; cf. Sailhamer 1976:127), but the Lord's choice of an heir from his own body is manifested in his words (Gn 15:4) "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." Abraham again expected that Ishmael might become the covenantal heir, but the Lord declared his choice that an heir shall be the son Isaac from Sarah's body as follows (Gn 17:19): "I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants." Here divine sovereignty dictates the selection of one son over the other (cf. Hamilton 1976:479). The divine sovereignty of his election has been confessed within the Jewish community as God's work not that of any human decision (Ps 113:5-9; Dt 7:6-7; cf. Jn 15:16; Kaiser 1978:89). Throughout family narratives in the book of Genesis, there is a pattern in which the natural choice is opposed to the divine choice (Gn 12:1; 13:8-9; 15:2-6; 17:18-19; cf. 25:23; 37:5-11; Kunin 1994:69; Westermann 1985:270; Wenham 1994:27).

Kunin (1994:62-63) tries to explain the birth of the promised son as follows:

> And in several places his advanced age is mentioned ... A similar pattern is developed in regard to Sarah. Throughout the text her barrenness is emphasized … divine birth is the third mytheme developed in the text … with the progressive denial of his physical parent, his spiritual parent comes to the fore … that is, Human birth.

Here the concept of "divine birth," which is contrasted with "human birth," seems to mean "the miraculous birth by God's intervention" in accordance with his promise without futile human efforts. Then, one may assert that every human endeavor that does not trust in the promise of the Lord was the reason for the delayed fulfillment of it. The main concern here is to debate on the matriarchs' performing futile human efforts to get God's promised seed (Gn 16:1-3; cf. Sailhamer 1976:134-135; Morris 1976:329; Hartley 1995:165; Westermann 1985:236; Mathews 1996:178; Von Rad 1972:191).

The acting out of futile human efforts seems to be related to the motif of the delayed fulfillment of the promised child. The narrative passage on Sarai's order of concubinage to both Hagar and Abraham (Gn 16:2-3) skillfully shows the futility of all human efforts to achieve God's blessings (cf. Wenham 1994:6; Sailhamer 1976:134-135; Morris 1976:329; Hartley 1995:165; Westermann 1985:236; Mathews 1996:178). Both narratives depict the same bad result of wrong efforts by covenant partners (Gn 3:8-24; 16:4-12; Wenham 1994:8; Mathews 1996:186).

Ishmael is called Abraham's "physical seed," whereas, Isaac is called the "promised seed" (cf. Gn 17:17-22; Williamson 2000:65; Sarna 1989:127). Then, the issue of a delayed birth is not about "physical seed" but about "the promised seed." The

Lord blessed Ishmael with every possible gift: many descendants, twelve princes, and a great nationhood, but there is no covenantal blessing here (cf. Gn 16:11-12; 25:12-18; Wenham 1994:27).

What is noticeable in the narratives of barren matriarchs is that they all had made at one stage or other a futile human effort to fulfill the promise of the Lord by their own doing (Gn 26:34-28:9; 31:19; 35:1-5). The second matriarch Rebekah also manipulated her beloved son Jacob to deceive his father that was regarded as morally objectionable, but ultimately all her maneuvers became futile (Gn 26:34-28:9 cf. Wenham 1994:212; Simpson 1978:679). All her efforts on behalf of Jacob only led to his flight from home and to a breach between two brothers for twenty years (cf. Gibson 1982:159; Bowie 1978:681).

The third matriarch Rachel also had tried to overcome her infertility through her futile efforts by taking mandrakes, which were famed for arousing sexual desire and for helping barren woman to conceive (Gn 30:14-16; Wenham 1994:246; Simpson 1978:705; Mathews 1996:486-488). She made another futile attempt to get pregnant by stealing her father's household gods, which was believed to ensure fertility or becoming the legal main heir of the estate (Gn 31:19, 30-37; cf. Wenham 1994:274; Mathews 1996:518; Hamilton 1955:292). But she had to bury the foreign gods in the time of crisis to worship the Lord at Bethel (Gn 35:1-5; Mathews 1996:618). Eventually the Lord was the one who made Rachel conceived as the answer to her prayer (Gn 30:22-24; cf. Simpson 1987:705),

Gibson (1981:219-220) asserts that if the birth of the promised child had been successful without the grace of the Lord, then it would have become another Babel tower. Sarna (1989:179) says, "The prolonged state of barrenness is profoundly

meaningful in that it is ended by a deliberate act of divine Providence, a clear sign that the resulting offspring are predestined to be the instruments of God's purposes." The Lord seemed to wait so long until Sarah gave up all human futile endeavors. Sarah tried to overcome her problem out of the futility of human efforts like that of Eve in Genesis 16 (cf. Sailhamer 1976:134). That was why the Lord did not intervene to fulfill his promise until Abraham and Sarah gave up all hope and became physical incapable (cf. Brueggemann 1982:160).

The following matriarchs Rebekah and Rachel also had to suffer the same barrenness for a long period like the first matriarch Sarah. The essence of the message is that the fulfillment of the promise of the Lord cannot be forced by any human meritorious works or any other futile human efforts, but it only can be happened by God's merciful and miraculous intervention (cf. Roop 1987:124).

### 4.4.6 Summary

God's acts of giving new names to the covenant partners are repeated several times within the patriarchal narratives (Gn 16:11; 17:4, 15, 19; 32:28). The act is understood as God's token of firm assurance to bless his covenant partners as well as the token of exerting God's sovereignty (cf. Gn 2:20; 2 Ki 23:34; 24:17). Human names in ancient days used to denote the religion they belong to. Sarah's old name "Sarai" may indicate a clue to the reason of her barrenness. Sarah's old name `yr;f'` (Sarai: princess) is generally understood as derived from Sharratu, of the pantheon of Haran, the title of the moon-goddess (cf. Jos 24:2).

Changing the old names of the covenant partners into new ones is understood as intended to show God's active decision to change their sinfulness and cursed destinies

of paganism into godly and blessed ones in the Book of Genesis (cf. Gn 17:5-6, 15-16; 32:28). Sarah's idol-worship-background seems to be one of the main reasons for her barrenness and the great delay of the fulfillment. Because the same pagan cultic background of the trio of matriarchs apparently attests that the procreation crisis (the barrenness) was linked to the sin of idol worship (Dt 17:6; 28:18, 53-57; 2Ki 23:5).

The most probable reason for the great delay seems to be the unbelief of Sarah. Sarah's biological impossibility of getting pregnant was a real fact (Gn 18:11). But Sarah apparently was challenged to keep faith in the Almighty God in the second scene (cf. 2 Ki 4:8-17). The main theme of the dialogue is to encourage Sarah to have "faith" in the promise of the Almighty God. The dialogue exposes Sarah's skepticism in the promise of the Lord. The skeptical character of Sarah is attested even by the depiction of her character in the larger context (cf. Gn 16). Sarah proposed that Abraham sleep with Hagar, which shows her unbelief in God's sovereignty to make Sarah conceive. The wording of Genesis 16:2-3 echoes the account of fall of man in Genesis 3:1-7: "and said" (Gn 3:2; 16:2); "and took" (Gn 3:6a; 16:3); "and gave"(Gn 3:6b; 16:3). Both narratives depict the same bad result of wrong and futile efforts of covenant partners (Gn 3:13-14; 16:4-12). Both women blame others for the regretting outcomes. Such performing of skeptical and futile human efforts is related with the motif of delayed fulfillment of the promised child.

Matriarchs were freed from barrenness through prayer: Rebekah (Gn 25:20-21, 26); Rachel (Gn 30:22-23); Hannah (1 Sm 1:10-20). Abraham prayed to God for his seed (Gn 15:2). Through Abraham's prayer the Lord opens every closed womb in Abimelech's household (Gn 20:17-18). The author emphasizes a simple essence of his theology that the Lord is the one who heals the barrenness of woman in response to the

prayer of His covenant partner Abraham.

Theological motif of emphasizing on divine choice is significant. Ishmael is called Abraham's "physical seed," whereas, Isaac is called "promised seed" (cf. Gn 17:17-22). Throughout family narratives in the book of Genesis, there is a pattern in which natural choice is opposed to divine choice (Gn 12:1; 13:8-9; 15:2-6; 17:18-19; cf. 25:23; 37:5-11). All the barren matriarchs once attempted the same futile human effort to fulfill the promise of the Lord (Gn 26:34-28:9; 31:19; 35:1-5).

Every human endeavor that does not trust in the promise of the Lord is the reason for the delayed fulfillment of the promise. The Lord waited for so many years that Sarah eventually gave up all her futile human endeavors. That was why the Lord did not intervene to fulfill his promise until Abraham and Sarah gave up all hope and became physically unable to have any children. Thus, the fulfillment of the promise of the Lord in the Abraham narrative was not attained by any meritorious work, but only by God's merciful intervention, which brings about "divinely given birth."

# CHAPTER FIVE: DEPICTION OF THE LORD AND HIS REQUIREMENTS IN THE FELLOWSHIP NARRATIVE (GN 18:1-15)

In the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) the Lord appears in human form. The motif for such characterization of the Lord is of main concern for scholars. Scholars who uphold the view of Abraham's immediate recognition of the divinity interpret the motif for his anthropomorphic appearance as God's granting of intimate fellowship with his covenant partners (cf. Gn 18:17a; Am 3:7; Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Ephrem the Syrian and Caesarius of Arles; Oden 2002:61-64; Calvin 1992:478; Hamilton 1995:17; Sailhamer 1976:144). This view is in conflict with traditional test motive view of God's visit. Thus the motive for God's appearance is closely related with the different views on the specific time of recognition of the divinity of the visitors. Therefore, the theological significance of the anthropomorphic descriptions needs to be debated further considering the exact time of the recognition of the visitors in this chapter.

This work finds out that the author presents his theological view on God's exalted character in both scenes (Gn 18:1-8 and Gn 18:9-15) right through this episode from beginning down to end (Gn 18:1-15). Abraham's responsive acts and the way he talks to the Lord are in accord with God's exaltedness. Therefore, this work asserts that his depiction of the Lord is directly relevant to our view that Abraham immediately

recognized the deity of the visitors.

The second scene (Gn 18:9-15) starts with the Lord's question: "Where is your wife Sarah?" Scholars who assert Abraham's later recognition of the divinity of the visitors interpret that it is to reveal God's omniscience to Abraham and Sarah for the first time. On the other hand, some of those scholars (cf. Wenham 1987:77; Hamilton 1995:12) assert that the question here is to invite those who are hiding away because of their wrong behavior (cf. Gn 3:9; 4:9; 16:8). The different underlying motive of God's question depends on the time of Abraham recognition of the divinity.

Readers find that the Lord demands doing covenantal righteousness in relation to the fulfillment of his promise within the linking episodes (Gn 17:1-27; 18:17-19). On the other hand, in the episode of Genesis 15:1-6, Abraham was depicted as the one who was credited as the righteous one by faith. Those different concepts of righteousness seem to create tensions for understanding the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-15). All these conflicting elements need to be dealt with as research gaps in this chapter.

### 5.1 Anthropomorphic Characterization of the Lord (Gn 18:1-15)

One of the striking features of biblical stories is that God appears as a character (cf. Chisholm 2006:31; Cole 2000:17). The Lord usually speaks through an audible voice in visions, and dreams during the night. Strikingly in this episode the Lord appears at daytime in human form (cf. Nm 12:6-8; Chisholm 2006:31). There are diverse depictions of the anthropomorphic acts of the Lord: appearing, going down, standing, eating, returning, walking, and going up (cf. Wenham 1987:76, 240). Usually the anthropomorphic appearance of God is indicated by the expression of "the angel of the Lord" (cf. Jos 5:13-15; Jdg 6:7-24; 13:1-25; Ex3:1-3; Hamilton 1995:6-7). In this

case (Gn 18:1) God himself appeared in human form as pointed out by the opening phrase “the Lord appeared to.”

The episode of Genesis 18:1-15 is an example of anthropomorphic description of God’s character. The Lord is described as a full-fledged round character here. He longs to relate himself to his covenant partners and moves towards the goal he has planned for them (cf. Chisholm 2006:31-32). Readers should not be embarrassed by the anthropomorphic narratives (cf. Chisholm 2006:32). The use of anthropomorphism in biblical depictions of God can not be denied (cf. Hamori 2004:231; Childs 1974:596; Ferre 1884:207). Anthropomorphism rather helps us to think more carefully about God (cf. Cole 2000:27). The study method of narrative criticism accepts this anthropomorphic depiction in the narrative as representing a real event and pays attention to the implied author’s theological intent for using such depictions (cf. Knight 2004:171).

### 5.1.1 God’s Intimate Relationship Depicted through Anthropomorphisms

The narrator in the Fellowship Narrative depicts the Lord’s activities in realistic terms. The Lord acts just like all human beings (cf. Gn 18:9-15, 16; 17-33; cf. Gn 32:23-33; Hamori 2004:150, 216). Generally the purpose of depicting God in human form is understood as a way of having effective communication with fellow human partners, since we cannot really see God with our natural human eyes (cf. Chisholm 2006:63; Hamori 2004:235). But there is a deeper intention than mere accommodation of our restrictions. The divine character in anthropomorphic narratives is commonly understood as the personal God who longs to relate himself to his people (cf. Chisholm 2006:32). The Lord’s activities depicted here (Gn 18) reflect some relational

significance with Abraham (cf. Hamori 2004:232). In other words, the anthropomorphic acts characterize the Lord's intimate relationship with his covenant partners (cf. Is 7:14; 9:6-7 and 11:1-5; Ross 1988:343; Harris 1980).

The nuance of the intimate character of the Lord is indicated by the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" (see ch.2.1.7 and ch.2.1.7.1). This phrase usually signals the Lord's intimate relationship with his covenant partners by appearing to those who have already experienced divine encounters before (cf. Gn 12:7; 17:1-8; 26:2-4; 35:9-13; Cassuto 1964:85-87; Mathews 1996:192-193; Wenham 1984:14-15). Therefore, there is no description of the covenant partners' terrified response to the theophany in this episode (cf. Bruegemann 1982:157). This specially granted intimacy is related to the privileged intercessory role of Abraham as a prophet for Sodom and Gomorrah in the next episode (cf. Gn 18:22-33; Ex 3; 1 Ki 19:1-18; Sarna 1989:142; Hamilton 1976:64). But there are still some more significant elements that emphasize God's intimacy in these anthropomorphic descriptions.

Firstly, God's eating characterizes his friendly intimate presence with his covenant partners (Ex 24:9-11; cf. Simpson 1978:1018; Ross 1988:343). The theological interpretation of the Lord's eating at Abraham's camp (Gn 18:8) has been a topic of intense debate between scholars wondering whether it was a real act or just a pretending one (cf. Sarna 1987:129; Josephus 1987:40). This episode is even suspected of having a Canaanite origin because this is a unique case of the Lord's eating in the Old Testament (cf. Hermann 1960:208-209; Gunkel 1997:196; Simpson 1978:507,618; Westermann 1985:275-279; Von Rad 1972:205; Skinner 1980:300; Hamori 2004:9; Korpel 1990:91; Xella 1978:483-488). Some scholars believe that the eating was really a material consumption of food through a momentary embodiment of heavenly beings

(cf. Calvin 1965:472; Keil 1996:146; Jamison et al 1997:156; Moberly 1992:20; Hamori 2004:43; Calvin 1965:472; Sarna 1989:129; Hamori 2004:43-44).

Narrative critics, however, are not interested in discerning the historical reliability, scientific proof, or source strata that lie behind the text. They are rather interested in determining the effect that the text has on the reader in its present form (cf. Knight 2004:170). If one accepts anthropomorphism as a metaphorical technique to express God's acts in human terms, then he (or she) may be freed from unnecessary arguments (cf. Korpel 1990:128; Harmori 2004:51-52). It is not necessary for readers to debate whether the visitors really ate the food or just pretended to do it. We rather have to find the author's theological intent (cf. Hamori 2004:52). For, the author is not concerned with this aforementioned issue at all. He has the literary freedom to depict eating as an act of the Lord (cf. Skinner 1980:300; Von Rad 1972:205).

According to the narration itself, the divine visitors gladly accepted Abraham's invitation (Gn 18:5, "Very well," they answered, "do as you say"; cf. Hamori 2004:40; Miller 1973:28). Generally the act of eating a meal is understood here as God's granting intimate fellowship to his covenant partners (cf. Ross 1988:342-343). In previous anthropomorphic expressions, God's acceptance of the sacrifices presented by thankful worshippers is depicted by these phrases: "the Lord looked" (`h[v`; Gn 4:1-5] or "the Lord smelled" (`xWr`; Gn 8:21). Both expressions are understood as symbolic anthropomorphic metaphors (cf. Lv 3:1-17; MI 1:6-14; Ps 50:7-23; cf. Korpel 1990:128; Hamori 2004:52). In the scene of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-8), the act of "God's eating" can also be understood as God's acceptance of Abraham's offering. I assert that there is no difference among these three terms to express God's pleasing acceptance: "the Lord looked," "the Lord smelled," and "the Lord ate."

Secondly, the Lord's appearance in ordinary human form characterizes his close relationship with Abraham (cf. Hamori 2004:72-73). Visiting of Canaanite deities were usually depicted as "enormous superhuman in scale" so that their approaching may already be seen from a long distance of "one thousand field, ten thousand acres" in ancient terms (cf. KTU 1.3 IV 38-39; SBV I; SBV II; Dalley 236; Hamori 2004:66-69; Smith 1988:425; Korpel 1990:90-91). In the case of the visiting deities in the book of Genesis there is no depiction of such an enormous human size. They seemed to appear just in the same size as all human beings (Gn 18:1-8; 32:23-33; cf. Jdg 6 & 13). The God of Israel may be pictured as immense (Is 6:1-5; Ezk 1:4-28), but in the text of the Fellowship Narrative the Lord is depicted realistically as human-sized when he makes contact with his covenant partners on earth. This may be understood as the Lord's effective method of communication and showing intimacy with his human covenant partners as well (cf. Hamori 2004:70-71).

### 5.1.2 Animated God through Anthropomorphism (Gn 18:1-15)

The Lord visits Abraham in the form of "three men" (Gn 18:1). Therefore, one may assert that the author intentionally depicts the mysterious character of the Lord through his literary skill (cf. Seebass 2000:127; Hamori 2004:41). There is a strange alternation between singular and plural address in verses 3-4, therefore, the real identity of the Lord may be shrouded in mystery (cf. Wenham 1994:51; Hamilton 1995; 7). These literary skills may be attributed to the narrator's intention to depict the hiding of God (cf. Von Rad 1972:205; Hamilton 1995:7-8; Alston 1988:400; Wenham 1994:51). The depiction in this narrative is written in paratactic style showing an economy of detail so that the identity of the Lord seems to be obscure (cf. Hamilton 1995:7).

However, for the readers who know the symbolic meanings of each word, phrase, and technical terms, this narrative is not mysterious. This obscurity is removed as the story proceeds (cf. Lundbom 1998:136-138; Hamilton 1995:7-8). Moreover, the author depicts Abraham's act of recognition by using the prophetic technical phrase of hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw: (Gn 18:2a, "And he lifted up his eyes and he saw and Lo" (Gn 31:10, 12; Jos 5:13; Ezk 1:4, 15; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9). Abraham, the privileged prophet is not scared by the revelation of the deity of his visitors. He is granted to discern the deity of the visitors from the initial moment of encounter (Gn 18:2, 9-15, 17-19; see ch.3.3).

Even if there was any motif for the hiding of the Lord in this episode, it is meant for giving honor to his privileged servants by granting Abraham the ability to discern his divinity among many others who do not recognize his deity (cf. Gn 41:1-45; Dn 2:1-49; Pr 25:2; cf. Hamilton 1995:7; Westermann 1985:277; Shailhamer 1976:142). One may also assert that the author described the acts of the Lord vividly using anthropomorphic depictions so that the readers may perceive them effectively as something that really happened (cf. Moberly 20; Hamori 2004:43-44). In other words, God's abstract or invisible acts are expressed here in visible and tangible human terms (cf. Wenham 1987:240).

This effective technique of anthropomorphism is reflected in the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to him." The opening phrase indicates a vivid revelation of the Lord (Gn 17:1, 22; 18:1; 26:2-4; 35:9-13; cf. Westermann 1985:155, 270; Hamilton 1976:377, 479; Mathews 1996:216, 207). The method of the Lord's communication with Abram seems to have developed gradually (from audible voice, visions, and deep sleep; Gn 15:1, 12; Ezk 1:1; Dn 7:1, 2; 8:1; 10:9; cf. Hamilton 1976:377, 418; Sarna 1989:91). In

Genesis 18:1 the author heightens its dramatic effect through the most vivid and *even visible depictions* with ar'ÛYEw: (*wayyera*), the Nifal imperfect form of the verb har. The Nifal imperfect is sometimes used in a frequentative sense (cf. Kelley 1992:140). Therefore, ar'ÛYEw: (*wayyera*) may be translated into "he revealed himself to be seen *as he used to"* (Gn 12:7; 17:1; cf. Sarna 1989:92; Brown 1979; Harris et al 1980; Van Gemeren 1997:1007; Westermann 1985:155, 270; Hamilton 1976:377, 479; Mathews 1996:216, 207). Thus, in the anthropomorphic narratives, a dynamic God is presented as the one who longs to relate to his people rather visibly than being hidden and mysterious (cf. Chisholn 2006:32).

The Lord is depicted as an active person here: He eats meals, talks with Abraham (Gn 18:9-15) and walks with him (Gn 18:16). One may propose that anthropomorphism is a primitive or archaic theological expression betraying a low concept of the deity (Gen.1: 27, 2:7, 3:8; 11: 5; cf. Simpson 1978:507; Korpel 1990:91; Hamori 2004:53; Wolf 1991:70; Tenney 1977). But, even in later periods in Israel history, God's role is depicted as the potter (Is 64:8; Jr 18:6; cf. Gn 2:7; Mathews 1996:196) and his acts are also described in an anthropomorphic way (Pss.119: 73; 33: 6; Isa.60: 13; Zech.14: 4; cf. Simpson 1978:617-618). Even in the New Testament era anthropomorphic expressions are used: "But if I drive out demons *by the finger of God*, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Lk 11:20; cf. Mt 12:28). Then, one may assert that anthropomorphic descriptions are not primitive but a brilliant and dramatic way of theological expression (cf. Wenham 1987:240).

In the creation narratives (Gn 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-25) two distinct features of God are described. One is that He is the transcendent and universal God (Gn 1:1-2:4a), and the other is depicting him anthropomorphically as covenantal Yahweh (Gn 2:4b-25 cf.

Cassuto 1964:85-87; Mathews 1996:192-193; Wenham 1987:14-15, 52-54; Westermann 1972:199). The Abraham narrative also shows these two different descriptive features (cf. Cassuto 1964:85; Boice 1982:90-91; Skinner 1930:54): the universal feature of God (Gn 1; cf. 12:3; 14:18-19; 15:2) and the anthropomorphic depicted feature of God as covenant God (Gn 2; Gn 17:1, 22; 18 & 19).

In the descriptions of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), God's transcendence or abstractness cannot be found but His immanence is shown vividly (Gn 18:1-15; cf. Chisholm 2006:32). Anthropomorphism is an effective mode of indicating divine-human communication (cf. Hamori 2004:47). Then, this mode also supports Abraham's recognition of his deity from the first moment of the theophany.

Therefore, in analyzing the character of God, we don't need to be concerned with making philosophical pronouncements about God's being. We need to look at the picture of God's unique character from the description itself (cf. Chisholm 2006:32; Wenham 1987:240).

### 5.1.3 Exalted and Dignified God even through Anthropomorphism

Many scholars assert that Abraham does not recognize the divinity of the three men until the Lord's verbal self-revelation in the second scene (Gn 18:9, 13-15; cf. Hamori 47; Wenham 1994:45; Gunkel 1997:192; Ross 1988:338). But Abraham's response to the appearance of his visitors in the first scene is not in accordance with the ordinary social status of fellow humans but with that of the highest one (see ch.3.3.2 and 3.3.2.1). The narrator describes God as being majestic and high through the manner in which he depicts His appearing, standing, and talking. He also describes those aspects through the way Abraham responds to the theophany.

Firstly, the posture of their physical "standing" may characterize God's dignity (see ch.2.1.9.1). Some recent scholars find this nuance of the deity's "firm standing" from the phrase "three men standing above him" (cf. Westermann 1985:277; Keil 1996:146; Hamilton 1995b:8; Mathews 1996:216). They translate the Nifal participle form of verb bcn (*natsab*) into "take one's stand," or "stand firm" (cf. Brown 1979). The verb has a theological connotation when it is used with a divine subject (cf. Gn 28:13; Ex 34:5; Nu 22:22; Ps 82:1; 1 Sm 3:10; Am 7:7; 9:1; Hamilton 1995b:8; Harris et al 1980; Botterweck et al 1998). Thus, the word itself implies an authoritative divine standing (cf. Ps 82:1; Harris 1980; Keil 1996:146; Hamilton 1995b: 8; Mathews 1996:216; Nelson 1997:81).

Secondly, the nuance of the phrase "Standing above him" (wyl'_[' ~ybiÞC'nI) Keil (1996:146) characterizes His highness. The other usage of the phrase in the book of Genesis 28:13, "the standing of the Lord above (wyl[) Jacob" denotes "the sovereign ruler-ship of the Lord" over heaven and earth and his watchfulness over Jacob sleeping in a dangerous situation (cf. Gn 28:13; Wenham 1994:222). The standing of the Lord over His servants also implies the diligence of the Lord who is trying to deliver the Israelites from the national crisis as well (cf. 1Sm 3:10; Am 7:7; 9:1; Ex 34:5; Job 4:16; Klein 1983:33). The nuance of the word wyl[ "above him" is contrasted with Abraham's watchful but humble "looking up" towards the heavenly visitors who stand in a higher posture at some distance (cf. Gn 28:13;Jos 5:13;Is 6:1-2; Dn 10:5; Mathews 1996:216; Sarna 1989:92; Harris et al 1980; Botterweck 1974).

Their firm standing near the great trees, which provides a religious symbolical setting, indicates the deity as standing (cf. Sarna 1989:91; Chisholm 2006:26; Skinner

1980:246; Ryken 1984:35; see ch.3.2.2). Therefore, this kind of visitors' standing above Abraham at the holy place gives a dignified and exalted impression of theopahany rather than an ordinary human standing (cf. Von Rad 1972:206; Gunkel 1997:192). Many scholars pay attention to their appearance at an unusual time of day and consider it as an indication of a sudden theophany (cf. Gunkel 1997:192; Skinner 1980:299; Wenham 1994:46). Mathews (1996:216) says, "The sudden appearance of travelers standing 'before him' suggests immediately that these guests were extraordinary."

The author does not give any indication of their being tiresome or hungry (cf. Gn 29:2; Ex 2:15; Jdg 6:11; Maher 1982:113; Excell 1900:1). This work asserts that if they were disguised travelers who were from afar (Gn 24:10; Jos 9:3-14; Jdg 19:3), they would have been accompanied by camels or donkeys. Long distance travelers on animals usually stop by the place of an oases or wells (Gn 24:11). Therefore, such sudden appearance without any accompanying animals may be another probable clue to the appearance of a deity.

Thirdly, the most honorable manner of greetings (bowing down to the ground) in front of visitors shows the visitors' high identity (see 3.3.2.1). Then Abraham acknowledges the Lord's highness and acts honorable.

Fourthly, Abraham's addressing his visitor(s) as "my Lord" (or "my lord") presents the highness of the Lord (see ch. 3.3.3.2; cf. Sarna 1989:128; Ross 1988:342). The vocative title "*adonai*" depicts Abraham's awareness and prudence to decide upon a proper manner, which fits the social status of visitors. For the calling "my Lord" shows that Abraham took these visitors to be nobility in the perspective of social status (cf. Hartley 1995:178). The vocalization indicates that three men are no ordinary wayfarers but for higher ones expressing honor for them (cf. Ross 1988:342; Sarna

1989:128).

Many scholars assume that Abraham addressed one of the three who had the most dignified and commanding air, or who perhaps was standing somewhat in front of the rest (cf. Speiser 1964:129; Hamilton 1995:6; Wenham 1994:46; Sailhamer 1976:144; Mathews 1996:216-217; Hamori 2004:36; Bush 1981:283). By the typical Hebrew narrative style of the auther, the obscure identity of three men is explained paratactically in the following scenes (cf. Hamilton 1995:7; Heard 2001:4-5). The identities of three men are clearly depicted (Gn 18:22, 19:1) as follows: One of three is "the Lord (Gn 18:17, 20, 26)," and two of them are "angels" (Gn 18:22; 19:1; cf. Kidner 1967:131). Then, readers may find a characterization of the highness of the Lord from these depictions (cf. Sarna 1989:129; Mathews 1996:216).

Fifthly Abraham's most courteous word of invitation indicates the superior status of the three men: "If I have found favor in your eyes" (ˆyn<ëy[eB. '!xe ytiac'Ûm' an" ‟-~ai). This phrase is used in Genesis many times (cf. Gn 19:19; 30:27; 32:6; 33:8, 10, 15; 34:11; 39:4; 47:25, 29; 50:4; Clark 1971:261-280; Westermann 1985:278). The phrase is a formal expression often used when someone who is subordinate is making a request to a superior or kingly one in the book of Genesis (cf. Gn 33:8, 10, 15; 1 Sm 27:5), and it is also used when a believer asks God or the divine being for a special favor (cf. Ex 33:13; 34:9; Jdg 6:17; Westermann 1985:278; Wenham 1987:145; Mathews 1996:217).

What is significant is that Lot used the phrase *after the recognition of the deities* of the visitors at the final moment of the episode (cf. Gn 19:18-20; Wenham 1994:58; Calvin 1965:510; Westermann 1985:304; Hamilton 1995:43). In Moses case, the phrase was used in the context of his prayer for requesting the presence of God (cf. Ex 33:12,

13, 16; Wenham 1987:145; Durham 1987:446-447; Simpson 1978:1076). Then, one may assert that Abraham immediately recognized the identity of his visitors as higher ones and asked the favor of their presence (cf. Gn 39:4; Wenham 1987:145). Thus, Abraham' way of speaking shows the highness of the Lord.

Sixthly, the succinct way the Lord responded to Abraham's invitation (Gn 18:5, "So do as thou have said") shows His highness (see 3.3.3.1). In ancient tales the greater person is always succinct in utterance (cf. Obadiah with Elijah: I Kings 18:7-15; Gn 18:5; Von Rad 1972:206; Simpson 1978:618).

Seventhly, Abraham's offering of a choice tender calf to his visitors also signifies God's highness (Gn 18:7; see ch. 3.4.3.1 and 3.4.3.1). Selecting a choice calf for visitors connotes that they are highly ranked ones (cf. Jamieson et al 1990:28; Bush 1981:286-287; Driver 1904:193; Dilmann 1987:95; Jamieson et al 1990:28; Hartley 2000:178). Thus, the author depicts the Lord as the most exalted character from the first moment of appearance up to the end in the first scene (Gn 18:1-8).

### 5.1.4 Summary

In the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), the Lord is depicted as a major, full-fledged round character. His acts of eating and speaking signify more than just merely having communication with his covenant partners. His human-like acts are understood as to depict the Lord's intimate relationship with his covenant partners (cf. Is 7:14; 9:6-7 and 11:1-5). Such intimate divine character is related to the common nuance of the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to," which always signals the Lord's intimate appearance for his covenant partners (cf. Gn 12:7; 17:1-8; 26:2-4; 35:9-13). Having no description about Abraham's terrified response to the theophany is the actual textual

proof that the Lord has granted Abraham the extreme privilege to enjoy intimacy with him (Gn 17:22; 18:1). Such a privilege indicates Abraham's initial moment of recognition of the deity (Gn 18:1-15).

In earlier depictions in Genesis, God's acceptance of thankful offerings by worshippers were expressed by technical terms like "the Lord looked at" (`h[v;` Gn 4:1-5], and "the Lord smelled" (`xWr` ; Gn 8:21). The act of "God's eating" is also understood as God's acceptance of Abraham's welcoming invitation. The Lord's appearance in normal human size also characterizes his intimacy with Abraham (Gn 18:1-8; 32:23-33; cf. Jdg 6 & 13) unlike the enormous superhuman appearances of visiting Canaanite deities seen already at a long distance (cf. KTU 1.3 IV 38-39; SBV I; SBV II).

The narrator described every act of the Lord vividly by anthropomorphic depictions so that readers may perceive them more effectively as something that really happened. God's abstract or invisible acts are expressed by visible and tangible human terms. Anthropomorphism is an effective way of expressing God's immanence. This effectiveness of anthropomorphism is related to the common nuance of the opening phrase "the Lord appeared to," since it indicates the more distinct and visible revelation of the Lord (Gn 17:1; 18:1; 26:2-4; 35:9-13).

The author also describes God's majesty and highness in terms of Abraham's responsive acts to the theophany. Abraham's responsive manners to the visitors are not related to ordinary social status but to that of the highest one. Firstly, the posture of their physical "firm standing" may characterize God's dignity. Secondly, the nuance of the phrase "Standing above him" (`wyl'_[' ~ybiÞC'nI`], which denotes sovereign ruler-ship (Gn 28:13), characterizes His highness. Their standing above him in the well-

known holy place as indicated by the great trees express an exalted impression of the Lord rather than just ordinary human travelers. The appearance at an unusual time without any accompanying animals indicates the appearance of a deity.

Thirdly, Abraham expresses the Lord's highness by bowing down to the ground before him. According to the ancient Near Eastern and Western Semitic cultures, if the visitors were ordinary human beings, they should have bowed down to the ground together with Abraham when he bowed down to them. But they did not. It shows that they are divine ones being much higher than Abraham.

Fourthly, the form of Abraham's address of "my Lord" in singular form towards one of them reveals the highness of the Lord.

Fifthly, Abraham's most courteous words of invitation indicates the superior status of the three men: "If I have found favor in your eyes" (cf. Gn 19:19; 30:27; 32:6; 33:8,10,15; 34:11; 39:4; 47:25,29; 50:4). Lot used the same phrase in his petition (Gn 19:19b) *after the recognition of the deities* of the visitors at the final moment of the episode (cf. Gn 19:18-20).

Sixthly, the way the Lord's succinct and authoritative response to Abraham's invitation (Gn 18:5, "So do as thou has said") shows His highness. Seventhly, Abraham's offering a choice tender calf to the visitors shows God's highness (Gn 18:7). According to ancient Near Eastern custom, selecting a choice calf for visitors connotes that they are highly ones (cf. 1 Sm 28:24-25).

### 5.2 The Narrator's Characterization of God's Faithfulness (`tm,a/` or `hn"Wma`) in the First Question (Gn 18:9a)

The second scene (Gn 18:9-15) of the Fellowship Narrative starts with the

Lord's question: "Where is your wife Sarah?" Abraham and Sarah might have been totally surprised, since the question reveals the omniscient knowledge of the Lord about the new name Sarah and her condition of barrenness (cf. Hamilton 1995:11; Calvin 1965:472; Gunkel 1997:196; Hartley 1995:178). If this was the first exposure of the visitors' deity, then, Abraham would have been utterly surprised (cf. Skinner 1980:301; Bush 1981:289). However, Abraham's answer was straight forward without any scared response: "There, in the tent" (Gn 18:9b; cf. Hamilton 1995:11). If Abraham already had recognized the divine identity at the initial encounter, he would not have any upset or embarrassed feeling here (see ch. 4.2).

Therefore, the question connotes rather an authoritative word to open God's conversation with a human covenant partner who already recognized the deity of the visitors. The Lord's question here starts in a similar fashion as when the Lord used to invite those who are hiding away from the presence of the Lord because of their wrong behavior (cf. Gn 3:9; 4:9; 16:8; Wenham 1987:77; Hamilton 1995:12). Sarah's skeptical attitude in believing the Lord's promise implies that she is unworthy to be blessed by the Lord (cf. Gn 16:1-16; 21:8-21). But the Lord is bent on solving human troubles (cf. Sarna 1989:130; Westermann 1985:244).

Faithfulness of the Lord (`tm,a/`) is most often linked with His steadfast-love (`ds,x,` ;cf. 1 Sm 26:23; 1Ki 3:6; Ps 38:5; cf. Bromiley 1979:274; Brown 1979; VanGemeren 1997:429). The divine exercise of `ds,x,` (*checedh* "loving-kindness" or "steadfast-love") is based on God's covenantal relationship with His people, therefore, frequently `ds,x,` describes the disposition and beneficent actions of God toward His covenant people (cf. VanGemeren 1997:211).

Then, the motive for making such a question may be understood as the Lord's

gracious seeking for Sarah from His loving-kindness and faithfulness in order to fulfill his promise (cf. Wenham 1994:48; see ch. 4.2). His following words of reconfirmation seem to reveal His faithfulness as well.

### 5.2.1 Characterization of God's Faithfulness by Giving Reconfirmation of the Promise (Gn 18:10-15)

The phrase "*Sarah* will have a son" is repeated significantly two times in the second scene, although it was mentioned already in the preceding episode *four times* in similar forms of sentences:

(1) "Surely give you a son by her ,,, she will become the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her" (Gn 17:16),
(2) "Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" (Gn 17:17),
(3) "Your wife Sarah will bear you a son" (Gn 17:19),
(4) "Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you" (Gn 17:21)

In this way the author puts a special emphasis on Sarah's conception in the episode of Genesis 17 and 18. Sarah also receives the honor as a wife of Abraham, for Sarah is cast in the role as progenitress of nations and kings (Gn 17:16, "she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her"; cf. Hamilton 1990:477). And the Lord calls her by the new blessed name Sarah *four times* in the second scene of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:9-15). The four times repeated calling forms a *Leitwort* revealing the underlying motive for the episode (cf. Wenham 1994:48; Venter 2005:9-10; Chisholm 2006:58). What could be the theological significance of this aspect?

Her new destiny is linked with her new name as a symbol of God's blessing (Gn 17:15-16; cf. Hartley 1995:173; Roop 1987:123). Receiving a new name is understood as God's token of firm assurance to bless his covenant partners as well as the token of the exerting of God's sovereignty (cf. Gn 2:20; 2 Ki 23:34; 24:17; Sarna 1989:121; Skinner 1980:287; Wenham 1994:10, 19; Hartley 1995:166; Mathews 1996:202). The Lord gives Sarah the honor for the first time in her life journey.

The predictive word with its time limit: "I will surely return about this time next year" (Gn 18:10) also shows the Lord's faithfulness by giving reassurance of his promise (cf. Wenham 1994:27, 48-49; Chisholm 2006:58). The phrase is repeated two times in this second scene (Gn 18:14). This predictive word with its time limit was given in the previous episode in Genesis 17:21 already. The Lord shows the certainty of his promise for his covenant partners through this repetition (cf. Sarna 1989:130; Mathews 1996:218).

But we must remember this. Sarah's thought of incredulity and laughter provoked two rhetorical questions of the Lord: "Why did Sarah laugh …" (Gn 18:13-14a). These two questions are understood as rather rebuking her small faith (cf. Dillmann 1897:96; Hartley 1995:179; Brugemann 1982:159; Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:49; Hamilton 1995:13; Mathews 1996:218; Bush 1981:291). The Lord seems to be patient even though Sarah makes Him angry. This disposition of the Lord may become a proleptic example of the word, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love (ds,x) and faithfulness (tm,a/)" (Ex 34:6; cf. VanGemeren 1997:428).In this way the word tm,a/ ("faithfulness," "truth") is linked with ds,x ("steadfast-love") depicting the character of the Lord (cf. Dt 7:9; Ex 3:6, 13-15, 16; Isa 49:7; Bromiley 1979).

The author describes Sarah as a weak and skeptical human being (Gn 18:11-12a; cf. Sarna 1989:130; Chisholm 2006:57; Brueggemann 1982:158; Excell 6-7; Ross 1988:344). The omniscient God knows Sarah's physical state makes it impossible to become pregnant (Gn 18:11-12a). However, the Lord teaches Sarah about the Creator's omniscience and his omnipotence to remove any unbelieving thoughts from the mind of Sarah (Gn 18:14b; cf. Ps 139:6; Jr 32:17, 27; Bush 1981:291; Hamilton 1995:14; Speiser 1964:130; Wenham 1994:49; Chisholm 2006:59; Skinner 1980:302). The promise of the Lord is able to be fulfilled regardless of any physical impossibility.

Thus, the word of the Lord in Genesis 18:13-14 characterizes God's faithfulness, because the Lord will fulfill what He has promised regardless of Sarah's weakness and her unbelief (cf. Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:48-49; Calvin 1965:476; Mathews 1996:218; Jarick 2000:84: Bush 1981:290; Westermann 1985:280-281). In this way the narrator depicts the Lord's faithfulness. Because the concept of God's faithfulness is His unchangeableness or immutability in special relation to His gracious promises (cf. Dt 7:9; Brown 1979; Van Gemeren 1997:211).

Therefore, Kaiser (1979:89) asserts that the life of the promised child was entirely a gift of God not a reward. Usually barrenness is removed not by good works but as result of prayer (Gn 25:21; 30:17; 1 Sm 1:12). Then, receiving a child here is solely the result of the mercy of God who shows His favor to Sarah (cf. Tenney 1977). Ironically Sarah's skeptical character even more enhances the depiction of the faithfulness of the Lord.

### 5.2.2 Characterization of God's Faithfulness in the Larger Context of the Abraham Narrative

Each theme of the narratives in the book of Genesis gains greater clarity as the story unfolds (cf. Gunkel 1994:35-37; Westermann 1985:180; Wenham 1987:279; Hamilton 1976:418-419). The theme of promised seed also develops from an initial simple statement to reinforced or more detailed descriptions as the events develop (Gn 12:2, 7; 13:14-16; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; cf. Sarna 1989:113). Along with such gradual developments of the theme, the Lord's characterization is also gradually elaborated and systemized further (cf. Gunkel 1994:42).

Usually reconfirmations of God's promises are given in a situation of discouragement caused by a dispute or by the delayed fulfillment of the promises (cf. Gn 13:5-18; 16:4-15; 17:1, 17; 26:20, 21, 22; Ex 17:2, 7, Nm 20:3, 13; cf. Sarna 1989:98-99; Mathews 1996:133-139). Usually the Lord tries to strengthen the discouraged heart of Abraham by using metaphorically visual aids like the numerous stars or like the dust of the earth (Gn 13:14-16; 15:5b; 26:4; cf. Gn 22:17; 28:14; Sarna 1989:113; Mathews 1996:166; Hamilton 1976:423). Usually new elements are augmented or added at each time of crisis of faith (Gn15:1-5; cf. Wenham 1987:329; Hamilton 1976:422; Mathews 1996:166; Williamson 2000:65, 71-72; Sailhamer 1976:127). For example, the rite of cutting animals is added to the promise as God's emphatic and unilateral reassurance about his promise (cf. Gn 15:17b; Ex 3:2; 19:9; 13:21; Jr 34:18; Sarna 1989:111-115; Westermann 1985:228; Wenham 1987:329, 333; Skinner 1980:283; Hamilton 1976:437). As Abraham is getting older, the Lord's encouragement develops into more detailed and emphatic forms (Gn 17:1a, 17, 24; cf. Sarna 1989:123; Wolf 1991:111; Wenham 1994:16, 19; Skinner 1980:291; Harris 1980). Thus, even in the larger context of the narrative, the Lord is characterized as the faithful one by his continual encouragement of his covenant partner Abraham.

**5.2.2.1 Characterization of God's Faithfulness by Using the Same Plot Sequence (Gn 15:1b-6 and18:9-15)**

As I indicated in chapter 2 (see 2.1.6 and 2.1.6.1) the author uses significant editorial skill to form a linking structure (Gn14 and 15; Gn17 and 18; cf. Westermann 1985:217; Sailhamer 1976:142; Wenham 1987:321). The author expects readers to consider each new episode in the light of what has gone before (cf. Knight 2004:171; Gunkel 1994:50). The author indicates the blessed motive of the Lord's appearance to Abraham reminding readers of former exemplary acts of righteousness that pleased the Lord very much (cf. "After these things," Gn 15:1; 14:20, 22-23; "the Lord appeared to him," Gn 18:1a; 17:23-27).

Now the author shows another literary skill within both episodes. The sequence of both dialogues is similar to each other (Gn 15:1b-6 and Gn 18:9-15; cf. Westermann 1985:217; Sailhamer 1976:142; Wenham 1987:321). They may be arranged as follows:

Genesis 15:1b-6

1. The Lord's giving a word of encouragement and comfort (15:1b and c).
2. Abraham responds negatively (complaining and putting lamenting questions out of discouraged faith in God's promise) (15:2-3)
3. The Lord gives reconfirmation of his promise (15:4-5)
4. The Lord declares Abram righteous (15:6).

Genesis 18:9-15

1. The Lord gives word of reconfirmation about the promised child (18:9-10).

2. Sarah responds negatively (laughter and thoughts of unbelief) (18:11-12).
3. The Lord gives reconfirmation with instructive rebuke (18:13-14).
4. The Lord utters the last word giving a recondite hint at Isaac (18:15)

According to the interpretation through those linking structure (cf. “After these things,” Gn 15:1; 14:20, 22-23; “the Lord appeared to him,” Gn 18:1a; 17:23-27; Hartley 1995:175), the motive for the Lord’s revelation in both episodes (Gn 15:1-6; 18:1-15) is understood as expression of the well wishing purpose of his visit (cf. Gn 26:24; 46:3; Is 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; Sarna 1989:112; Mathews 1996:163; Westermann 1985:218; Roop 1987:111).

However, in Genesis 15:2-3, Abram shows a lamenting response being skeptical to the Lord’s word of encouragement. The exemplary Abraham in Genesis 14 is now portrayed as a frustrated person (Gn 15:2-3; cf. Roop 1987:109). But the Lord is trying to strengthen the weak faith of Abraham with his word of reconfirmation using some metaphorical visual aids (Gn 15:1-6; cf. Sarna 1989:113; Mathews 1996:166; Hamilton 1976:423). The dialogue (Gn 15:1-6) closes with a firm statement that Abram remains steadfast in his faith in God (cf. Sarna 1989:113; Sailhamer 1976:128).

In the same way Sarah also shows a skeptical response to the Lord’s word of encouragement (Gn18:10, 12; cf. Westermann 1985:219, 221; Roop 1987:111; Skinner 1980:278-279; Hamilton 1976:419; Wenham 1987:327-329; Von Rad 1972:183). But the Lord tries to strengthen the hesitating faith of Sarah by giving her a hortatory word (Gn 18:13-15; cf. Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:48-49; Calvin 1965:476; Mathews 1996:218; Jarick 2000:84: Bush 1981:290; Westermann 1985:280-281). The Lord just repeats the word of reconfirmation (Gn 18:10, 14) to generate the faith in the skeptical

heart of Sarah. Thus, the author depicts the "faithfulness of the Lord" towards his chosen ones by using the same sequential plot skill.

#### 5.2.2.2 Characterization of God's Faithfulness by Means of a Sandwich Structure (Gn 18-21)

As this work researched in chapter two (2.1.5), the event of the Sodom tragedy (Gn 18:16-19: 38) and the perilous abduction episode by king Abimelech (20:1-2) are sandwiched (inserted) between the introductory part (Gn 18:1-15) and the final fulfillment (Gn 20:3- 21:7; cf. Ross 1988:340; Mathews 1996:246; Wenham 1994:75; Westermann 1985:274).

The main theological theme of the sandwiched structure is that the chosen ones who received God's promise may fall in danger and face threats of failing God's promise, but the faithful Lord intervenes in the situation and makes His promise to be fulfilled magnificently (cf. Gn 12:1-13:1; Sailhamer 1976:116; Sarna 1989:93, 97; Westermann 1985:161, 318; Wenham 1994:68; Mathews 1996:122, 246-247; Hartley 1995:140). The narrator seems persuaded that life is fragile (cf. Van Gemeren 1997:213). Even though God's chosen ones show human deficiency, Yahweh rescues them and fulfills his promises (cf. Von Rad 1972:169; Sarna 1989:93; Hartley 1995:137; Westermann 1985:168; Tenney 1977; Keiser 1979:89; Mathews 1996:122).

These sandwiched stories apparently show that Abraham could not attain security by his own meritorious good behavior, but only God could save him from such circumstances (cf. Dt 9:4-6; Wenham 1984:291; Hamilton 1976:387). Thus, the author introduces the Lord as the faithful one in keeping what he has promised for his beloved covenant partners.

### 5.2.3 Summary

The theological concept of God's faithfulness (tm,a) is His unchangeableness or immutability in special relation to His gracious promises (cf. Dt 7:9). Faithfulness of the Lord (tm,a/) is most often linked with His steadfast-love (ds,x, ; Ex 34:6; 1 Sm 26:23; 1Ki 3:6; Ps 38:5). The divine exercise of ds,x, is based on God's covenantal relationship with His people. The disposition and beneficent actions of God is toward His covenant people.

God is characterized as the faithful one in many ways. Firstly, the underlying motive for asking the question "Where is your wife Sarah?" (Gn 18:9a) characterizes the faithfulness of the Lord. By the same form of question the Lord used to invite those who were hiding away from the presence of the Lord because of their wrong doings, he now wishes to sort out their troubles (Gn 12:1, 7; 13:14; 15:1).

Secondly, giving a word of reconfirmation about the birth of Isaac characterizes God's faithfulness (Gn 18:10-15). The phrase "*Sarah* will have a son" repeated two times and the Lord calls her by new blessed name Sarah *four times* in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15). Calling her on her new name four times is showing God's token of firm assurance to bless Sarah as well as the token of the exerting of God's sovereignty (cf. Gn 2:20). Especially the predictive word with its time limit "I will surely return about this time next year" is repeated two times in the second scene (Gn 18:10 and 14). Through this repetition the Lord shows the definitive certainty of his promise for his covenant partners.

Thirdly, the faithful Lord tries to fulfill his promise regardless of Sarah's skeptical laughter and unbelieving thoughts (Gn 18:13-14). The Lord tries to teach

Sarah His omnipotence as Creator to remove any unbelieving thoughts from her mind. Therefore, the promised child was entirely a gift of God not a reward (Gn 25:21; 30:17; 1 Sm 1:12).

Fourthly, God's faithfulness is apparent even within the larger context of the Abraham narrative. The theme of promised seed develops from the initial simple statement to reinforced or detailed descriptions as events develop (Gn 12:2, 7; 13:14-16; 15:1-21; 17:1-27). Usually more concrete promises are given at the time of Abraham's crisis of faith (Gn 15:1-5). As Abraham is getting older, the Lord's encouragement develops into more detailed and emphatic ones.

Fifthly, the dialogue of Genesis 15:1b-6 also shows a similar plot sequence as that of Genesis 18:9-15. In Genesis 15:2-3 Abram shows a lamenting response being skeptical of the Lord's word of encouragement like Sarah who shows a skeptical response here in Genesis 18:10, 12 (Gn 15:2-3, 8; Gn 18:11-12). But the Lord is trying to strengthen the weak faith of Abraham with his word of reconfirmation using some visual aids (Gn 15:4-5). The Lord does the same for the skeptical Sarah by giving her a hortatory word for Sarah (Gn 18:13-15). Thus, the Lord is faithful towards his chosen ones.

Sixthly, characterization of God's faithfulness is apparent through a sandwich structure in the Abraham narrative (Gn chs.18-21; cf. 12:10-20). The chosen ones may face threats of failing God's promise, but the faithful Lord intervenes in the situation and makes His promise to be fulfilled even though God's chosen ones show human deficiency or weakness. Abraham could not attain security by his own meritorious good behavior, but only God could save in such circumstances (cf. Dt 9:4-6).

**5.3 Characterization of God's Righteousness in the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15)**

In the earlier episode of Abraham narrative (Gn 15:6), the narrator introduces a concept of righteousness (hq")d'c.), which denotes *a right relation to God* conferred by a divine sentence of approval (cf. Von Rad 1972:185; Skinner 1980:280; Simpson 1978:600-601; Lasor 1996:49). It is the theological definition about human righteousness.

Within the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), there is no literal term for righteousness (hq")d'c) of the Lord. The Lord just tries to *deliver* Sarah from her barrenness by giving her a word of encouragement convincing her of His omnipotent creative power (Gn 18:9-15; cf. Wenham 1987:273; Hamilton 1976:72-74; Mathews 1996:265-267; Hasel 1998:181-182; Hartley 1995:179). Generally the deliverance of matriarchs from infertility is understood as God's act of *deliverance*, namely God's gracious visits (dq:ïP') (Gn 21:1; 50:24-25; Ex 4:31; 1 Sm 2:21; cf. Sarna 1989:145; Hamilton 1976:72-73; Wenham 1994:80; Hartley 198).

Deutero-Isaiah understands that "God's righteousness" is a synonym for "God's salvation or *deliverance*" (Is 46:13; 51:5-8; 62:1 cf. Von Rad 1962:372; Baker 1961:246). The Lord endeavors to deliver the first matriarch Sarah from her barrenness in the second scene of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:9-15). Then God demonstrates his righteousness by upholding his covenant while Sarah is skeptical in believing in His promise (Ps 11:3, 5, 9; cf. Botterweck 1974:260). This character is understood as the characterization of God's faithfulness (see ch.5.2 and 5.2.1). Divine ds,x, (*hesed*, "faithfulness") *saves* His people from natural disasters, the hostilities of enemies and any personal weaknesses (cf. Van Gemeren 1997:213). Therefore, one may say that

"*Tsedaqa"* is the execution of God's covenant faithfulness and covenantal promises (cf. Harris 1980). The Lord shows His righteousness by carrying out what he promised as an obligation (cf. Baker 1961:240-241).

Sarah's thought of incredulity and laughter provoked two rhetorical questions of the Lord: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gn 18:13-14a). The question "Is anything too difficult (hard) for the Lord?" (Gn 18:14) also indicates Sarah's apparent lack of faith in God's omnipotence as Creator who is able to fulfill what He has promised (cf. Hartley 1995:179; Wenham 1994:49; Calvin 1965:476; Mathews 1996:218).

The effect of the two rhetorical questions seems to remove any unbelieving thought from the mind of Sarah (cf. Bush 1981:291; Hamilton 1995:14; Speiser 1964:130). One may say that the Lord tries to instruct Sarah to have the same faith of Abraham so that she may stand in the state of being righteous like Abraham (Gn 15:6). In a sense, the righteous Lord seems to demand Sarah to be righteous like Him and Abraham. The concept of righteousness in Genesis 15:6 needs to be explained further to understand the Lord's endeavoring act to instruct Sarah (Gn 18:9-15).

### 5.3.1 The Lord Demands Sarah (Gn 18:9-15) to be Righteous by Faith (Gn 15:6)

As I researched on the preceding section (5.2.2.1), the sequence of both dialogues is similar each other (Gn 15:1b-6 and Gn 18:9-15). The episode of Genesis 15:1-6 deals with the theological concept of "faith." The quotations in the second part of the second scene deal with the issue of the faith of the covenant partner (cf. Brueggemann 1982:158; Kidner 1967:131; Venter 2005:11, 17; see ch.4.1). Therefore, the common interpretative perspective of both episodes needs to be considered to

interpret on the second scene of the Fellowship Narrative properly (Gn 18:9-15).

The traditional explanation of the words in Genesis 15:6, hw"+hyB;¥ !mIßa/h,w, "Abraham believed the Lord" has been assigned the word !mIßa/h "believed" to the Hiphil (causative active) of the verb with an internal-transitive function. It may therefore be translated as follows: "And he (was) caused to trust in Yahweh" or "He was made to be firm in Yahweh" (cf. Hamilton 1976:424; Speiser 1964:112; Brown 1979; Botterweck 1974). The word "believe" is used here to express the state of mind of Abraham who is sure of God's promise to be trust worthy (cf. Keil 1996:135-136). Considering the function of causative active (Hiphil) of the verb, having (or putting) faith must be understood as man's passive attitude initiated and stimulated by the word of God (cf. Isa.7:4, 9; 28:16; 2 Ch 20:20; Von Rad 1972:185). What prompted Abram's faith was the promise of the Lord (cf. Hamilton 1976:424). Thus, faith is presupposed everywhere as the correct response of man to God's revelation (cf. Wenham 1987:329).

In the second scene of the fellowship narrative (Gn 18:9-15), the Lord alone is endeavoring to generate the faith in the heart of Sarah. Abraham says nothing in response to the extraordinary promise and these two rhetorical questions (cf. Gn 18:10, 14; Gunkel 1997:197). While the Lord is paying close attention to the problem of Sarah, Abraham just stands there silently (Gn 18:9-15; cf. Hartley 1995:179; Mathews 1996:218; Jarick 2000:84; Westermann 1985:280-281). Abraham's silence may be understood as the proper attitude for one who receives the message of the Lord (cf. Hamilton 1995:14; Westermann 1985:279; Sarna 1989:130; Botterweck et al 1974). The Lord gave to Abraham a word of reconfirmation (v 10) and again the Lord spoke to Abraham by making two rhetorical questions (v v 13-14). Abraham is supposed to

respond to these words of the Lord, but Sarah answered the Lord abruptly (v 15).

When it comes to dealing with Sarah's obstinacy in the matter of her barrenness, Abraham becomes passive conceding Sarah the right to control Hagar (Gn 16:5-6; 21:12; cf. Roop 1987:118; Hartley 1995:165; Mathews 1996:269). Abraham experienced harsh troubles by listening to Sarah's persuasion passively (cf. Gn 16:1-6; cf. Roop 1989:118; Mathews 1996:269; Hartley 1995:165; Wenham 1994:7).

Ironically Sarah clearly has a passive attitude in the matter of faith. In Sarah's case, there is no clear literal depiction that Sarah believed in God's promise except the responding word, "I did not laugh," which may be interpreted into "I believed in your promise." Wenham (1994:49) says, "In this way, Sarah unwittingly confirms the divine promise." The significance of this final dialogue (v 15) is that the name of her future son is reiterated in recondite wording ("I did not laugh," "Yes, you did laugh"; cf. Mathews 1996:219; Wenham (1994:49; Hartley 1995:180; Hartley 1995:180; Roof 1987:138). Readers only find the result of her faith in Genesis 21:1-7 (cf. Wenham 1994:81).

In Genesis 15:6b the narration, "He credited it to him as righteousness" (hq")d'c. ALß h'b,îv.x.Y:w: ) is a fixed idiom denoting "to reckon or credit something to someone's account" (cf. Hamilton 1976:425; Bush 1981:244-245; Botterweck 1974). The Lord reckoned Abram's response as righteousness. Abraham's righteousness consists in trusting in God's promise with full confidence that God will fulfill His gracious promise (cf. Driver 1904:176; Von Rad 1972:185; Wenham 1987:329; Mathews 1996:169; Lasor 1996:49). In other words, hqdc (*tsedaqa*) may mean that a covenant partner is in *a right relation to God* conferred by a divine sentence of approval as a covenant partner shows a *receptive* response to the promise of the Lord

(cf. Von Rad 1972:185; Skinner 1980:280; Simpson 1978:600-601; Lasor 1996:49). The Lord always initiates a good relationship with His covenant partner by using a trustful word of promise, which generates faith (cf. Von Rad 1972:185).

In Sarah's case also the Lord uses a trustful word to generate faith in her heart. Sarah is exhorted to believe that God can do the impossible and unreasonable in the thinking of Sarah (cf. Ross 1988:345; Brueggemann 1982:158). The main theme of the dialogue in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15) is to exhort Sarah to have "faith" in the promise of the Almighty God. According to the narrator's depiction, readers may not be sure of whether Sarah unwittingly confirms the divine promise or not (cf. Wenham 1994:49). However, one may say that Sarah is demanded strongly by the Lord to have faith in His promise (Gn 18:13-14) so that she also may be in the right relation to God like her husband Abraham (Gn 15:6).

In the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15), the Lord does not deal with Abraham's matters any longer, but deals with Sarah's problem of unbelief. Does it mean that Abraham's problem had solved already in the previous episode (Gn 17:1-27)?

### 5.3.2 God's Demand to do Righteousness in the Larger Context

The execution of God's covenant faithfulness or His endeavor to keep His promise for Abraham is the depiction of God righteous act (cf. Baker 1961:240-241; Harris 1980; Botterweck 1974:260). As Abraham is getting older, the Lord's encouragement for him develops into a more detailed and emphatic one (Gn 17:1a, 17, 24; cf. Sarna 1989:123; Wolf 1991:111; Wenham 1994:16, 19; Skinner 1980:291; Harris 1980). Thus the righteousness of the Lord is depicted as His constant character.

On the other hand, the promise to Abram seems to be initially unconditional (Gn

12:1-3. 7), but the Lord seems to demand covenantal requirements to do later on (Gn 17:1-14 and 18:19; cf. Westermann 1985:289; Wenham 1994:20-31). There seems to be a juxtaposition of a unilateral aspect of the covenant with the bilateral aspect of the covenant in the whole Abraham narrative (cf. Von Rad 1972:209). The second scene of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:9-15) seems to show God's unilateral faithfulness towards skeptical Sarah who doubts the fulfillment of God's promised son (see ch. 5.2; 5.2.1; 5.2.2.; 5.2.2.1). But in the preceding linking episode the Lord requires a bilateral covenantal obligation, which includes getting circumcised. It seems to be significant to find out how both aspects of the covenantal commandment of the Lord are functioning in the understanding of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15).

#### 5.3.2.1 Demand of Righteousness (Gn 17:1d-2) and the Fellowship Narrative

In the preceding linking episode, the Lord commands Abraham seemingly of doing righteousness at top level (Gn 17:1d); ~ymi(t' hyEïh.w< yn:ßp'l. %LEïh;t.hi ("Walk before me and be blameless"). It may remind readers of the description of the righteous life of Enoch and of Noah, who are the paragons of righteousness (Gn 5:22, 24; 6:9; Sir 44:17; Jub 5:19; Wis 10:4; 1 Enoch 67:1; cf. Mathews 1996:356-357). Both the life of Enoch and of Noah is depicted with the phrase "he walked with God" (Gn 5:22, 24; 6:9; cf. Skinner 1930:131; Wenham 1994:20; Mathews 1996a: 357-358; Westermann 1986:358; Keil 1996:79; Sarna 1989:43; Shailhamer 1990:181). The theological emphasis of the phrase "he walked with God" formulated with the words qyDI²c; and ~ymiîT' (Gn 6:9-12) is of importance to understand the flood narrative. The term ~ymi(t',, which is the antonym of "corruption," also was used to describe the righteous life-style of Noah in

the nuance of ethical and forensic righteousness before the judgment of God (Gn 6:9, 11; cf. Hamilton 1976:461; Skinner 1930:159; Mathews 1996:358; Skinner 1930:159; Wenham 1987:169; Hartley 1995:170).

Hamilton (1976:461) explains the different nuances of both phrases, "he walked with God"; "walk before me": The phrase "He walked with God," describes the accomplished state in which Noah lived (Gn 6:9), but "walk before me" is the word of demand for Abraham to do hereafter (Gn 17:1d). Therefore, the phrase "Walk before me" yn:ßp'l. %LEïh;t.hi, may be understood as a technical term to demand a faithful and absolute loyalty to the Lord like Enoch and Noah did (cf. Gn 5:22,24; 6:9; 24:40; 48:15; cf. Hamilton 1976:461; Sarna 1989:123). One may question whether the demand "walk before me" is a new command imposing a precondition for receiving the promised son Isaac or not. If it is not, then, what could be the underlying nuance of this sudden new strong demand?

#### 5.3.2.2 Theological Nuance of "Walk before me"

Readers must pay attention to the author's literary skill to understand the proper nuance of the demand here. More commonly %l;h' (go, walk, depart, proceed, move, and behave) refers to life lived in obedience with reference to covenant standards (cf. Lv 26:3; Dt 8:6; 11:22; Van Germeren 1997:1002-1033; Brown 1979). What is significant is that the divine imperative demand to "walk" %l;h' is not a command that Abraham receives here for the first time (cf. Hamilton 1990:461). What could be the proper theological nuance of the verb?

Firstly, the author depicts Abraham's obedient character by using the %l;h' verb right from the first stage of his life after his calling (cf. Wenham 1987:278; Dunnill

1992:173): ^ïc.r>a;me ^±l.-%l, (imperative form of %l;h') “Leave your country (Gn 12:1)”; ~r'ªb.a; %l,YEåw: “and Abram left or departed (Gn 12:4)” (imperfect form of %l;h'; cf. Henry 1708:85; Exell 1978:179). The main use of the imperfect is to express repeated, habitual, or customary actions, whether in the past, the present, or the future (cf. Kelley 1992:130). Then, readers may imagine Abraham’s constant obedient character from the imperfect verb %l,YEåw (“and he departed”; Gn 12:4; cf. Alexander 1995:51, 56). The Lord commands Abraham again, %LEåh;t.hi (*hitpael* imperative form; “Go to and fro,” “walk through,” ”walk about,” and “behave oneself”; Gn 13:17; cf. 1 Sm 2:30; Henry 1708:111), and Abraham obeyed, ~r'ªb.a; lh;äa/Y<w: (Imperfect of lh;a' “to pitch a tent,” “to move a tent,” “So Abraham moved”; Gn 13:18; cf. Wenham 1987:298).

Historically the use of *hitpael* form of the verb is understood as a code for dominion (Gn 13:17; Jos 18:4, 8; cf. Van Gemeren: 1997:1034). Here Abraham is asked to walk about in the promise land having faith that it is given to him already. What is more significant is that Abraham’s action of obedience is reiterated in the imperfect form. This depicts Abraham’s constant character of obedience to the Lord again. Therefore, even though the word !mIßa/h, (*he’ emin*, *“he believed”*), appears in the middle of the Abraham narrative for the first time (Gn 15:6), but Abraham’s having faith in God’s promise is depicted from the beginning of his calling by the use of the verb %l;h' (cf. Gn 17:23; 18:16; 24:51; Wenham 1987:278; Murphy 1873:308; Calvin 1948:350). Abraham has been presented to readers as a paragon of faith and obedience throughout his life since his was called by the Lord (cf. Hamilton 1990:376, 423; Wenham 1987:278; Mathews 1996:166; Ha 1989:114-115; Dunnill 1992:173). In Genesis 17:23-27, Abraham obeyed a new demand of getting circumcision, by which he

adhered again to covenant principles after 13 silent years' alienation from the Lord (Gn 16:16-17:1; cf. 1 Sm 3:1; Calvin 1948:350; Henry 1708:110; Wenham 1994:19). In another words, his life is grounded again in a obedient walk (`%l'h]m;` ; cf. Gn 24:40; 48:15; Van Gemeren 1997:1033).

Significantly the verb `%l;h'` in Qal particile form is used again right after the event of the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:16): `~x'(L.v;l. ~M'Þ[i %lEïho ~h'êr'b.a;'w>` ((“And Abraham *walked with them* to sent”). If one accepts the view that Abraham already recognized the divinity of the three visitors, the nuance of Abraham's walking with them should mean more than a kind civil manner. Metaphorically the phrase may indicate that Abraham, who recovered the right covenantal relationship with the Lord, enjoys having *intimate fellowship* with the Lord (cf. Is 41:8; Jn 15:14; Hamilton 1990:258). For the phrase echoes the depiction of Enoch's life: “Enoch walked with God” (Gn 5:22), which connotes Enoch's a special intimacy with God and a life of piety (cf. Wenham 1987:127). The narrator seems to depict Abraham as a righteous one like Enoch.

Sometimes Abram becomes frustrated under harsh situations, but faithful obedience was Abram's normal response to the Lord's words (cf. Wenham 1987:329). I may assert that in Abraham narrative (Gn 11:27-25:11) there is no separation between “Abraham's having faith in God's covenantal commands” and “his obeying the Lord” except the event in Genesis 16 (cf. Ha 1989:114).

Secondly, it is a fact that the command (Gn 17:1, “Walk before me”) is given thirteen silent years after the birth of Ishmael (Gn 16:16; 17:1a; cf. Hamilton 1976:460; Wenham 1994:18). The sequence of events is important because readers are expected to consider each new episode in the light of what has gone before (cf. Knight 2004:171).

For, each preceding incident is the natural cause of the event that follows (cf. Gunkel 1994:50). The report of Abram's age (Gn 17:1a), "When Abram was ninety-nine years old," serves as a connecting link to the preceding narrative of Ishmael's birth in Genesis 16:16, "Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar born him Ishmael" (cf. Sailhamer 1976:137).

Then, what could be the underlying implication of these long silent years? Many scholars understand Abraham's accepting Hagar as a surrogate mother in this episode of Genesis 16 as a great mistake (cf. Wenham 1994:7; Sarna 1988:119; Mathews 1996:178; Von Rad 1972:208; Sailhamer 1976:134-135; Morris 1976:329; Hartley 1995:165; Westermann 1985:236; Calvin 1948:350). According to the linking structure, the author seems to imply that the Lord is so much displeased that he had been silent for thirteen years without any word of revelation (Gn 16:16 and 17:1a; cf. 1 Sm 3:1; Calvin 1948:350; Henry 1708:110; Wenham 1994:19).

Then, the nuance of the command, "Walk before me and be blameless" to Abraham, may be understood in a somewhat rebuking mood but reminding of Abraham's earlier obedient character by renewing His promise (Gn 12:1, 4; 13:17, 18; 15:6; 17:23; cf. Calvin 1948:377, 442). The Lord seems to remind Abraham not to repeat the act of unbelief in God's promise any longer (Gn 17:1; cf. Exell 1978:232). Thus, the nuance of the demand must not be understood as imposing a new precondition to receive a promised son, but as instructing or animating him to have the same faithful and obedient attitude as Abraham showed in his earlier days (Gn 12:4, 13:18; 15:6; cf. Gn 24:40; 48:15; cf. Wenham 1994:298; Calvin 1948:377, 442).

#### 5.3.2.2.1 Theological Nuance of "Be blameless"

When the adjective ~ymi(t' ( blameless, whole, perfect) is used in ritual texts for sacrificial animals offered to God, it means “without blemish” (Lv 1:3, 10; 3:1; Ex 12:5; cf. Sarna 1989:123; Gunkel 1997:143; Hamilton 1990:277; Skinner 1980:291; Mathews 1996:201; Hartley 1995:170; Van Gemeren 1997:307). It is applied to describe either the human character (or life-style) or the physical condition of man (Gn 6:9; Lv 21:16-23; cf. Westermann 1986:414; Hamilton 1976:461). It is further used to indicate the serenity of the unclouded relationship between God and the righteous (Gn 6:9; Dt 18:13; Jos 24:14; cf. Van Gemeren 1997:307). The term ~ymi(t', has been understood as the antonym of “corruption” describing the righteous life-style of Noah in the nuance of ethical and forensic righteousness before the judgment of God (Gn 6:9, 11; cf. Hamilton 1976:461; Skinner 1930:159; Mathews 1996:358; Skinner 1930:159; Wenham 1987:169; Hartley 1995:170). Therefore, the term may indicate that Abraham is expected to emulate Noah’s moral perfection (namely, being righteousness) in the context of imminent judgment of Sodom city (cf. Wenham 1994:20).

According to the rabbinic view and that of some modern Christian scholars, the term “blameless” in Genesis 17:1 is understood as connoting the requirement of circumcision (cf. Rabba 46:I; Sarna 1989:123; Mathews 1996:201; Wenham 1994:20; Hartley 1995:170; Roop 1987:121). The nuance of the phrase (Gn 17:1d) seems to signal the demand of physical blamelessness by executing a new covenantal rite on the body, which is circumcision (Gn 17:1, 9-14; cf. Hamilton 1976:461; Roop 1987:121; Mathews 1996:201). If one can accept this view, then the function of this passage (Gn 17:12, 23-27) may be understood as the foreshadowing the Passover (cf. Ex 12:11, 20, 39; Harris 1980; Westermann 1985:271; Shailhamer 1976:116; Wenham 1987:291,300; Hamilton 1976:386; Mathews 1996:123). The mass circumcision (Gn 17:23-27) is

understood as the prolepsis of the Exodus rules (Ex 12:43-51). Because, according to the Passover restrictions, getting mass circumcision is a precondition to eat the Passover meals: “No uncircumcised male may eat of it” (Ex 12:48; Jos 5:2-10; see ch. 3.1.1).

Here the Lord demands from Abraham to take up a “new covenantal responsibility (circumcision)” as a necessary obligation (Gn 17:7-14, 23-27; Ex 12:43-51) before the doomed destruction of Sodom like the bringing judgment on all the gods of Egypt during the night of Passover (Ex 12:1-30). It is a bilateral aspect of covenantal relationship between the Lord and His covenantal human partners. One may ask whether this is a new stipulation in relationship with the birth of Isaac being a precondition for the birth of Isaac or not (Gn 17:19). It might have created a tension in the heart of Abraham. But Abraham obeyed it promptly. Therefore, the significance of such willing obedience draws the close attention of the readers.

### 5.3.3 Reason of Abraham’s Willing Obedience

One may think about the motive of Abraham’s willing obedience without any hesitation. Cassuto (1992:309) introduces a significant rabbinic interpretation on the short word “leave” or “go your way” (^±l.-%l,; Gn 12:1), which is literally interpreted “Go to you,” which means “Go for your benefit and good.” Cassuto (1992:309) explains the phrase by quoting Rabbi Rash’s view: “It is not possible to suppose that the Bible wishes to tell us that it was for his personal *advantage* that Abram went to Canaan.” When the Lord commanded Abram for the first time to leave home place, He promised Abram with an exceedingly great blessings (Gn 12:2-3).

When the Lord commanded Abraham to do a new command of getting circumcision, He commanded it also with the blessing of great increase of descendants (Gn 17:2, 5, 16) and with definite reconfirmation of Isaac’s birth within a time limit (Gn

17:19-21; cf. Hamilton 1976:138). Among some west Semitic groups, circumcision is the sign of procreation (cf. Mathews 1996:198, 204; Sarna 1989:126; Skinner 1980:297). These forms of giving commands with exceedingly great promise of blessing seem to be the prolepsis of what Moses said in Deuteronomy 28:1-2, "If you fully obey the Lord your God … the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you." It seems to be significant to note this common aspect of the Lord's commandments within the Abraham narrative. It is another example of bilateral aspect of covenantal relationship (cf. Linington 2002:693). As for those who desire to be blessed (or to be delivered), obeying the Law is not burdensome at all. Therefore, one may guess that Abraham very much desired the blessing of great increase of descendants having belief that he and his descendants will become very fertile by getting circumcision (cf. Hamilton 1990:470). In the Abraham narrative, bilateral obligation of human covenant partner does not seem to be burdensome at all. Should we still interpret that getting circumcision as a precondition of receiving Isaac?

#### 5.3.3.1 Theological Significance of Getting Circumcision for Interpreting the Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15)

Circumcision is known as both a token of God's covenant on the flesh and also as a symbol of the Jew's consecration and commitment to a life lived in consciousness of that covenant (cf. Sarna 1989:123, 125; Von Rad 1972:201; Skinner 1980:293-294). The requirement of circumcision does not seem to be set as the precondition for the birth of Isaac. For, the covenant of circumcision is depicted as future oriented and as a permanent physical mark of the descendants *after him* (cf. Hamilton 1976:465, 480; Mathews 1996:204). The focus of God's demand rather rests on posterity by repeating

the phrase "your descendants *after you*" six times in this chapter (Gn 17:7, 8, 9, 10, 12; cf. Hamilton 1976:465-468; Speiser 1964:124; Roop 1987:122; Sarna 1989:124).

We note that God's promise concerning Isaac set within a fixed time limit was made before his birth (Gn 17:21; 18:10, 14). He was destined to become God's covenant partner by choice in rejection of Ishmael. So the circumcision was to be done with Isaac after his birth as a future obligation: "But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year" (Gn 17:21; cf. Hamilton 1976:479; Skinner 1980:295). This covenantal command is addressed to an entire community and not to an individual only (cf. Sarna 1989:125; Mathews 1996:198; Hamilton 1990: 480). Roop (1987:122) asserts, "Circumcision does not make the individual a 'godly' person, but incorporates one into the community with who God has an unending covenant."

Therefore, the law of circumcision must not be understood as the precondition for the birth of Isaac. Abraham hurried to do the requirement of circumcision on his body without hesitation, and then on Ishmael, and on every male in his extended family on the very day he received the new covenantal commandment (Gn 17:23-27; cf. Hamilton 1976:480; Mathews 1996:208; Gaebelein 1990:141). What is significant is that the narrator used the *imperfect* tense of the verb `lWm` "circumcise" in the phrase "Abraham … and circumcised (`lm'Y"÷w:`) them" (Gn 17:23). The implication of the imperfect seems to be significant again, since it expresses habitual and customary actions (cf. Kelley 1992:130). The depiction of what Abraham did in the imperfect tense seems to imply again Abraham's constant obedient character as well as the covenantal obligation that must be done continually among the descendant of Abraham.

His obedience here is understood as the righteous act (cf. Gn 22:15-18; 26:2-5;

cf. Von Rad 1967:371; Skinner 1980:303; Henry 1708:110). Abraham's righteousness consists in trusting in God's promise with full confidence that God will fulfill His gracious promise (cf. Driver 1904:176; Von Rad 1972:185; Wenham 1987:329; Mathews 1996:169; Lasor 1996:49). Thus, Abraham showed his faith in God's promise again (cf. Wenham 1987:329). Abraham's obedience here was prompted by the promise of the Lord as he did in Genesis 15:6 (cf. Hamilton 1976:424). In this way Abraham's problem with the Lord was solved in the previous episode of the Fellowship narrative by doing his obligation (Gn 17:23-27; cf. Gaebelein 1990:141). What Abraham obeyed for his own benefit is the bilateral aspect in covenantal relationship between the Lord and Abraham.

According to the liking structure between Genesis 17:23-27 and Genesis 18:1, the Lord is already pleased very much by this renewed righteous act of Abraham (Gn 17:23-27). Consequently, the Lord graciously visits Abraham's camp in the most intimate human form to bless him by having covenantal fellowship meals with Abraham and his household (see ch. 2.1.6; 2.1.6.1). This is the reason why the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the larger narrative complex of Genesis 18 and 19 must be named the "Fellowship narrative." Even more, in the second scene, the Lord deals with the problem of Sarah's unbelief intensively, which Abraham was not able to solve out (Gn 18:9-15).

This is one of the unilateral acts of the Lord in the covenantal relationship, which is what the Lord does always to encourage those who are in trouble giving blessed promises (Gn 11:30; 14:14-17; 15:3-4; 17:1). The Lord endeavors to keep his promises by special interventions unilaterally (Gn 12:17; 15:4; 18:9-15; 20:3; 28:12). Therefore, the first scene of the fellowship narrative (Gn 18:1-8) must be read in the

motive of the Lord's well-wishing visit after Abraham recovered his righteous status with the Lord by obeying the bilateral obligation (see ch. 2.3.2 and 2.4). The second scene (18:9-15) must be read in the perspective of the Lord's unilateral intervention, which depicts His faithfulness for His weak covenant partners (see ch. 5.2.1). God's unilateral faithfulness seems to be lavished upon His righteous human covenant partners who obeyed His new bilateral requirement of getting circumcision (cf. Dt 7:9, 12-13; Ex 3:6 VanGemeren 429). The Fellowship Narrative (Gn 18:1-15) is a good example showing God's character by the word "faithfulness," which is linked with "steadfast love" and "righteousness" (cf. Bromiley 1979:274).

### 5.3.4 Summary

**Characterization of God's Righteousness**

The Lord endeavors to deliver the first matriarch Sarah from her barrenness in the second scene of the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:9-15). God's righteousness is the execution of His covenantal faithfulness. God demonstrates His righteousness by upholding his covenant while Sarah is skeptical in believing in His promise. The Lord tries to instruct Sarah to have the same faith of Abraham so that she may stand in the state of being righteous like Abraham (Gn 15:6). In a sense, the righteous Lord demands Sarah to be righteous like Him and Abraham.

The Hiphil form of the verb `!mIßa/h` "believed" in Genesis 15:6, "Abram believed the Lord "(Gn 15:6), may be interpreted as "And he (was) caused to trust in Yahweh" or "He was made to be firm in Yahweh." The Hiphil verb indicates man's

passive attitude initiated and stimulated by the word of God. What prompted Abram's faith was the promise of the Lord. Abraham's righteousness consists in trusting in God's promise with full confidence that God will fulfill His gracious promise.

In the second scene (Gn 18:9-15), the Lord alone is endeavoring to generate the faith in the heart of Sarah. Sarah is in passive attitude in the matter of having faith.
The Lord uses a trustful word to generate faith in the heart of Sarah. Sarah is demanded strongly by the Lord to have faith in His promise (Gn 18:13-14) like her husband Abraham (Gn 15:6).

**God's Demand to do Righteousness in the Larger Context**

In the preceding linking episode (Gn 17:1d-2), the phrase "Walk before me" yn:ßp'l. %LEïh;t.hi, may be understood as a technical term to demand a faithful and absolute loyalty to the Lord like Enoch and Noah did (cf. Gn 5:22,24; 6:9). More commonly %l;h' (go, walk, and behave) refers to life lived in obedience with reference to covenant standards (cf. Lv 26:3; Dt 8:6; 11:22). What is significant is that the divine imperative demand "walk" %l;h' is not the first time
The author depicts Abraham's obedient character by using the %l;h' verb right from the first stage of his life after his calling: ^ïc.r>a;me ^±l.-%l, (imperative form of %l;h') "Leave your country (Gn 12:1)"; ~r'ªb.a; %l,YEåw: "and Abram left or departed (Gn 12:4)" (imperfect form of %l;h'). The main use of the imperfect is to express repeated, habitual, or customary actions, whether in the past, the present, or the future. The Lord commands Abraham again: "Walk through" (Gn 13:17), and Abraham obeyed, ~r'ªb.a; lh;äa/Y<w: (Imperfect of lh;a' "So Abraham moved"; Gn 13:17-18). Abraham's action of obedience is reiterated in the imperfect form. This

depicts Abraham's habitual and constant character of obedience to the Lord. By this literary skill of the narrator, Abraham is depicted as a righteous one.

Sometimes Abram becomes frustrated under harsh situations, but faithful obedience was Abram's normal response to the Lord's words. In Abraham narrative there is no separation between Abraham's having faith in God and his obeying the Lord. According to the linking structure, the author implies that the Lord is so much displeased that he had been silent for thirteen years without any word of revelation (Gn 16:16 and 17:1a). The nuance of the command, "Walk before me and be blameless" to Abraham, may be understood in a somewhat rebuking mood but reminding of Abraham's earlier obedient character by renewing His promise. The Lord seems to remind Abraham not to repeat the act of unbelief in God's promise any longer. Thus, the nuance of the demand may be understood as instructing or animating him to have the same faithful and obedient attitude as Abraham showed in his earlier days (Gn 12:4, 13:18; 15:6; cf. Gn 24:40; 48:15).

The term ~ymi(t', has been understood as the antonym of "corruption" describing the righteous life-style of Noah in the nuance of ethical and forensic righteousness before the judgment of God (Gn 6:9, 11). Abraham is expected to emulate Noah's moral perfection (namely, being righteousness) in the context of imminent judgment of Sodom city. The term "blameless" in Genesis 17:1 may signal the demand of physical blamelessness by executing a new covenantal rite on the body, which is circumcision (Gn 17:1, 9-14). The mass circumcision (Gn 17:23-27) is understood as the prolepsis of the Exodus rules (Ex 12:43-51). Abraham obeyed it promptly.

**Reason of Abraham's Willing Obedience**

The short word “leave” (ˆ±l.-%l; Gn 12:1) needs to be understood literally. It means “Go to you,” which connotes “Go for your benefit and good.” When the Lord commanded Abram for the first time to leave home place, He promised Abram with an exceedingly great blessings (Gn 12:2-3). When the Lord commanded Abraham to do a new command of getting circumcision, He commanded it also with the blessing of great increase of descendants (Gn 17:2, 5, 16) and with definite reconfirmation of Isaac’s birth within a time limit (Gn 17:19-21). This common aspect of the Lord’s commandments within the Abraham narrative indicates that as for those who desire to be blessed or to be delivered, obeying the Law is not burdensome at all. Abraham very much desired the blessing of great increase of descendants by getting circumcision.

Significance of Getting Circumcision for Interpreting the Fellowship Narrative

Abraham hurried to do the requirement of circumcision on the very day he received the new covenantal commandment (Gn 17:23-27). Abraham’s obedience here was prompted by the promise of the Lord as he did in Genesis 15:6. His obedience here is understood as the righteous act (cf. Gn 22:15-18; 26:2-5).

According to the liking structure between Genesis 17:23-27 and Genesis 18:1, the Lord is already pleased very much by this renewed righteous act of Abraham (Gn 17:23-27). Consequently, the Lord graciously visits Abraham’s camp in the most intimate human form to bless him by having covenantal fellowship meals with Abraham and his household in the first scene (Gn 18:1-8). This is the reason why the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the larger narrative complex of Genesis 18 and 19 must be named the “Fellowship narrative.”

In the second scene of the Fellowship narrative (Gn 18:9-15), God’s unilateral faithfulness lavished upon His righteous human covenant partners who obeyed His new

bilateral requirement of circumcision (cf. Dt 7:9; Ex 3:6).

# CHAPTER SIX: Summarily Conclusion of the Thesis

Many scholars interpret Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors according to the interpretative perspective of Hebrews 13: 2 in the New Testament (see ch.2.1.8.1). Some of them attempt to interpret the motive for the Lord's visit as the testing of Abraham's hospitality in the fashion of Greek legends (see ch. 2.1.8). They assert that the motive for the disguised appearance of the Lord is to test Abraham's hospitality.

Therefore, Abraham's exceedingly great hospitality is interpreted as the

exemplary manner of saints that is worthy to be rewarded (see ch.1.1). Consequently the birth of Isaac is interpreted as a reward. This simple rewarding interpretation focuses only on the act of hospitality and it breaks the thematic flow of the whole Abraham narrative. For Abraham had received a word of promise repeatedly, which shows God's covenantal faithfulness (Gn 12:2-3, 7; 13:14-17; 15:4-5; 17:1-21).

Those scholars presume that the Lord disguised his identity so that Abraham was not able to recognize his divinity in the beginning asserting that God only begins to reveal himself in verse 9 or 10 (see ch.1.1.). Therefore, Abraham's acts, talks, and preparing meals for the three visitors are interpreted as those of civil manner. This view is in conflict with the consistent view that Abraham had been depicted as a privileged prophet since he was called by the Lord (Gn 12:1; 15:1; 20:7). Readers also face difficulties to understand why Abraham had to prepare a huge amount of food (three *seah,* around 39 liters) for three ordinary visitors. According to the ancient Near Eastern custom, slaughtering a choice calf for just ordinary visitors is unthinkable. (see ch.3.4.2 and 3.4.3)

I find that those views are fragmented because it is based on an interpretative perspective borrowed from outside the Old Testament disregarding the author's own theological intent. The first section of the Hebron narrative (Gn 18:1-15) must be interpreted in line with the author's own theological intent as expressed through the author's unique literary skills in the text itself. Inter-textual study on the parallels must be limited to the Old Testament, for it provides a common theological perspective of the Old Testament about theophany (Ex 3:1-4:17; Jdg 6:11-24, 13:1-25).

The most important task set for this thesis was to clarify whether Abraham recognized the deity from the first encounter with the visitors or only during the course

of the conversation. This is important because the view on the time of recognition of the divinity of the three men affects the way in which all the elements of Abraham's action in the narrative are understood. **Readers can recognize the author's diverse literary skills without any problems**.

"*Sandwiched structure"***:** The theological intent of this structure indicates the Lord's faithfulness to fulfill what He has promised in the midst of Abraham's harsh experiences (see ch. 2.1.5 and 2.1.5.1): God's promise (heading part; Gn18:1-15; cf. Gn 12:1-9) faces perilous threats (in the sandwiched part; Gn 18:16-20:2; cf. Gn 12:10-16), but Yahweh rescues his chosen ones (closing part; Gn 20:3-21:7; cf. Gn 12:17-13:2). We analyzed that the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the Hebron narrative (Gn 18:1-33) forms "the heading part" of the sandwiched macro-plot (Gn 18:1-21:7)

*Linking Structure*: The opening phrases in both Genesis 18:1 "The Lord appeared

to him" and Genesis 15:1"After these things" establishes connections with the preceding events (Gn 14:20). Abraham's exemplary act of faith is depicted in the preceding events (Gn 17:23-27 and Gn14:13-24). The circumcision episodes are always illustrations of Israel's faithful obedience (Gn 17:23-27; Jos 5:1-9; see ch.2.1.9.1). Therefore, the motive for the Lord's revelation in both episodes (Gn 18:1-15; 15:1-6) must be understood as an expression of the Lord's satisfaction and the beneficial purpose of his visit to his covenant partner (cf. Gn 26:24; 46:3; Is 41:10, 13, 14; 43:1, 5; see ch.2.1.6 and 2.1.7). The opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" also signals the Lord's intimate appearance to his covenant partner who has already experienced divine encounters many times before (cf. Gn 12:7; 17:1-8; 26:2-4; 35:9-13; see ch.2.1.7).

*Plot Sequence*: The dialogue of Genesis 18:1-15 also shows a similar plot

sequence as that of Genesis 15:1b-5 (see ch.5.2.2.1):

(1) Both Abraham and Sarah show lamenting and skeptical responses to the Lord's words of encouragement (Gn 15:2-3; 18:10).

(2) But the Lord is trying to encourage Abraham (Gn 15:4-5); the Lord is trying to generate faith in the heart of skeptical Sarah (Gn 18:13-15). Thus, the author repeatedly expresses the Lord's faithfulness towards his chosen ones by using the same literary technique.

*Repeating Recondite Clue word*: The author is skillful to get across his theological view to his readers by using a word play with specific clue words foreshadowing the birth of Isaac "laughter" (see ch.4.3.2). The author keeps repeating the clue word qxc ("laugh") four times: "Sarah laughed" (Gn 18:12); "Why did Sarah laugh" (Gn 18:13); "I did not laugh"; "Yes, you did laugh." Even though the covenant partners laughed skeptically to the incredulous birth announcement of the Lord (Gn 17:17; 18:12), the Lord turned their laughter of disbelief into joy (Gn 21:6). This literary skill attests that the birth of Isaac was not caused by the meritorious works of a human covenant partner but only by the faithfulness of the Lord.

*Depiction of God through Anthropomorphisms:* In the episode of Genesis 18:1-15 the Lord acts just like human beings: eating, talking, and walking with Abraham (Gn 18:9-15, 16; 17-33; cf. Gn 32:23-33). The divine character in anthropomorphic narratives is commonly understood as the personal God who longs to relate himself to his people. In other words, the author characterizes the Lord as the one who wishes to have an intimate relationship with his covenant partners by anthropomorphic description (cf. Is 7:14; 9:6-7 and 11:1-5; see ch.5.1.1).

**The first Scene (Gn 18:1-8):**

*There is no depiction of Abraham's terrified response to the theophany.* This fact may be understood as the textual proof that the Lord has granted Abraham to enjoy fellowship with him. The depiction of God eating with human being also implies his pleased acceptance of Abraham's offering and sharing the most intimate fellowship with Abraham like God's "watching" (Gn 4:4-5) and smelling (Gn 8:21; cf. Jdg 6 and 13 (cf. Ex 24:9-11; see ch.5.1.1).

*Characterization of Abraham as a Forerunner to the Great Prophets:* Abraham's actions are used to depict Abraham's character in this narrative as a forerunner of the later great prophets (see ch. 3.3; ch. 3.3.1). The technical verb pair `'hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: 'wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw:` (Gn 18:2a, "And he lifted up his eyes and he saw and Lo!") signals a prophetic watchful action of recognition (cf. Gn 24:63; 37:25; 43:29; Jos 5:13; Jdg 19:17). The Hebrew verb in the Qal form of `har` "to look at," has also metaphorical meaning, indicating "to perceive," "to understand," which belongs to the formal prophetic vocabulary (Gn 1:10, 12; Ex 3:4; 8:11). The repeated usage of the same verb in the opening part of the narrative (Gn 18:2a and b) emphasizes Abraham's prophetic watchful act of recognition (Ezk 1:4, 15, 26; 2:9; 8:2; 10:1, 9; Jos 5:13; Zch 5:5). The depiction of the Lord's revelation in the Nifal form of the verb `har` (*ra-a*), which means "to reveal oneself," "to be seen," and "to be visible" matches well with Abraham's prophetic recognition. It caused Abraham's hurried actions to welcome them in an extraordinary way.

*Characterization God's Highness:* The author describes God's majesty and his highness in two ways through God's dignified way of talking (Gn 18:5, "So do as thou has said") and Abraham's responsive acts to the theophany (Gn 18:2-8; cf. I Kings 18:7-

15; see ch.5.1.3). The way Abraham acted is not that shown for someone having an ordinary social status but that shown only for the highest one. Abraham's bowing down to the ground also shows the highness of the Lord (cf. Gn 23:7, 12; 33:3; 37:7; 42; 2 Sm 9:6; 14:4; 1Ki 1:47; Is 2:20; 44:15: 46:6; see ch.3.3.2.1).

If the visitors were ordinary human beings, they should have also bowed down to the ground together when Abraham bowed down to them. But they did not. It indicates that they are divine beings much higher than Abraham. Abraham addressing them as "my Lord" reveals the highness of the Lord. Abraham's most courteous words of invitation, "If I have found favor in your eyes," indicates the superior status of the three men (cf. Gn 19:19; 30:27; 32:6; 33:8,10,15; 34:11; 39:4; 47:25,29; 50:4).

Abraham's presenting of a choice tender calf to his visitors also shows God's highness (Gn 18:7; see ch.3.4.3). LXX scholars decided to give a cultic nuance to the food in their translation. The best meal from a choice calf indicates Abraham's sense of the distinction of his guests who are in the highest status, which implies the Lord.

**Second Scene (Gn 18:9-15):**

*The Motive for God's Calling upon Sarah:* The Lord called Abraham's wife by her new name "Sarah" in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15). Giving a new name is understood as a token of God's firm assurance to bless his covenant partners as well as a token of the exerting of God's sovereignty to change cursed paganism in the book of Genesis (cf. Gn 2:20; 17:5-6, 15-16; 32:28; 2 Ki 23:34; 24:17; see ch.4.4.1 and 4.4.2). Human names in ancient days used to denote the religion they belong to. Sarah's old name `yr;f'` (Sarai: princess) is generally understood as derived from the name Sharratu, the title of the moon-goddess, the wife of moon god Sin. It indicates that

Terah's family was once involved in moon worship (Jos 24:2). Sarah's idol-worship-background is one of the main reasons for her barrenness. Then, Sarai, the idol-worship-background name, needed to be changed to heal her barrenness.

*God's Faithfulness:* God's faithfulness is depicted here in many ways. Firstly, the underlying motive for the question "Where is your wife Sarah?" (Gn 18:9a) is to invite those who were hiding away from the presence of the Lord because of their wrong doings (Gn 12:1, 7; 13:14; 15:1). Secondly, giving the predictive word with its time limit "I will surely return about this time next year," which is repeated two times in the second scene (Gn 18:10 and 14; cf. Gn 17:21) characterizes God's faithfulness. Through this repetition the Lord shows the definitive certainty of his promise. Thirdly, the faithful Lord tries to fulfill his promise regardless of Sarah's skeptical laughter and unbelieving thoughts (Gn 18:13-14). The Lord tries to teach Sarah about His omnipotence as Creator to remove her unbelieving attitude from her mind. Thus the main theme of the dialogue here (Gn 18:9-15) is to encourage Sarah to have "faith" in the promise of the Almighty God (see ch.5.2.1). Therefore, the promised child was entirely a gift of God not a reward at all (Gn 25:21; 30:17; 1 Sm 1:12).

*God's righteousness:* God's righteousness is the execution of God's covenant faithfulness and his covenantal promises. All the aspects of God's faithfulness may be understood in terms of His righteous character in this narrative (see ch.5.3). The Lord tries to *deliver* Sarah from her barrenness in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15; cf. Gn 21:1; 50:24-25; Ex 4:31; 1 Sm 2:21). The Lord endeavors to generate the faith in the heart of Sarah. Then, He is actually showing His righteous character in this second scene (Gn 18:9-15). Sarah is demanded strongly by the Lord to have faith in His promise (Gn 18:13-14) like her husband Abraham (Gn 15:6). The Lord uses a trustful word to

generate faith in the heart of Sarah.

**Theological Significance from the Research on the Fellowship Narrative:**

Faithful obedience was Abram's normal response to the Lord's words (Gn 17:23-27). In Abraham narrative there is no separation between Abraham's having faith in God and his obeying the Lord. The nuance of the demand (Gn 17:1, "Walk before me and be blameless") may be understood as instructing or animating him to have the same faithful and obedient attitude as Abraham showed in his earlier days (Gn 12:4, 13:18; 15:6; cf. Gn 24:40; 48:15).

*Reason of Abraham's Willing Obedience:* The short word "leave" (ˆ±l.-%l,; Gn 12:1) means "Go to you," which connotes "Go for your benefit and good." When the Lord commanded Abram to leave home place, He promised Abram with an exceedingly great blessings (Gn 12:2-3). When the Lord commanded Abraham to do a new command of getting circumcision, He commanded it also with the blessing of great increase of descendants (Gn 17:2, 5, 16). This common aspect of the Lord's commandments within the Abraham narrative indicates that as for those who desire to be blessed, obeying the Law is not burdensome at all. Abraham very much desired the blessing of great increase of descendants by getting circumcision. His obedience here is understood as the righteous act (cf. Gn 22:15-18; 26:2-5).

According to the liking structure between Genesis 17:23-27 and Genesis 18:1, the Lord is already pleased very much by this renewed righteous act of Abraham (Gn 17:23-27). Consequently, the Lord graciously visits Abraham's camp in the most intimate human form to bless him and his wife by having covenantal fellowship meals.

This is the reason why the first section (Gn 18:1-15) of the larger narrative complex needs to be named the "Fellowship narrative."

**CONCLUSION**

In the larger context Abraham's actions of obedience are depicted as something reiterated in the imperfect form of each verb, which show his habitual and constant character of obedience to the Lord (Gn 12:4, 13:18; 15:6; 24:40; 48:15). In Abraham narrative there is no separation between Abraham's having faith in God and his obeying the Lord. By this literary skill of the narrator, Abraham is depicted as a righteous one (see ch.5.3.2.2).

The interpretative perspective of the testing motive of the Lord's visit, which is borrowed from outside of the Old Testament, must be rejected. For God's well wishing purpose is indicated by the literary linking structure that reminds us of Abraham's prompt reply and his willingness to be circumcised in the previous episode (Gn 17:23-27; see ch. 2.1.6 and 2.1.6.1). By this obedience Abraham has recovered his righteous relationship with the Lord. The opening phrase "the Lord appeared to" always signals the Lord's intimate appearance to his covenant partner who has already experienced divine encounters many times before (cf. Gn 12:7; 17:1-8; 26:2-4; 35:9-13). The fact that there is no description of any terrified response by Abraham to the theophany is the textual proof that the Lord has granted Abraham to enjoy fellowship with him (see ch. 2.1.9).

The presumption that the Lord disguised his identity so that Abraham was not able to recognize his divinity must be rejected. For Abraham's act of watching is depicted as that of a forerunner of the later great prophets. The technical verb pair

‘hNEhiw> ar>Y:ëw: ‘wyn"y[e aF'ÛYIw: (Gn 18:2a, “And he lifted up his eyes and he saw and Lo!”) signals a prophetic watchful action of recognition. The repeated use of the same verb in the opening part of the narrative (Gn 18:2a and b) emphasizes Abraham’s prophetic watchful act of recognition (see ch. 3.3 and 3.3.1).

This prophetic recognition caused Abraham’s hurried actions to welcome them in an extraordinary way. Therefore, the interpretation over every element of Abraham’s responsive action must be interpreted by the cultic perspective toward the deity rather than in terms of mere civil manners showing hospitality toward ordinary visitors.

The interpretative view of giving a son as a reward to a hospitable host must be rejected. For, it is a borrowed view from outside the Old Testament disregarding the theological intent of the author. This simple rewarding interpretation breaks the thematic flow of the whole Abraham narrative. The episode in the first part of the Hebron narrative (Gn 18:1-15) must be interpreted according to the theological intent of the sandwiched structure, which indicates the Lord’s faithfulness to fulfill what He has promised in the midst of Abraham’s harsh experiences (see ch. 2.1.5; ch. 5.2.2.2).

The birth of Isaac must be understood as God’s gracious visit showing faithfulness (Gn 18:10a, 14; 21:1; see ch. 5.2.1). The faithful Lord tries to fulfill his promise regardless of Sarah’s skeptical laughter and unbelieving thoughts (Gn 18:13-14). The Lord tries to *deliver* Sarah from her barrenness in the second scene (Gn 18:9-15; cf. Gn 21:1; 50:24-25; Ex 4:31; 1 Sm 2:21). Therefore, the promised child was entirely a gift of God not a reward at all as the repeated recondite clue word “laughed” connotes (Gn 25:21; 30:17; 1 Sm 1:12; see ch. 5.2.1).

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