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International Agreements, Judah in Egypt, and the Problem of "Language": A Verbal Pattern to Explain □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ in Isa 19:18

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Article abstract

The phrasing in Isa 19:18 □□□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ has proved vexing linguistically and historically. In this article, I explore previous proposals and offer support for a non-linguistic reference to the idiom based on verbal parallels elsewhere as well as cognate evidence. I conclude with further reflection on the idiom in Isa 19:18 and broader implications from this study, which includes observations about the semantics of □□□□ based on parallel uses of the lexeme in the Hebrew Bible.

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SAMUEL BOYD

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INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS, JUDAH IN EGYPT, AND THE PROBLEM OF "LANGUAGE": A VERBAL PATTERN TO EXPLAIN שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן IN ISA 19:18*

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INTRODUCTION

The rhetoric in Isa 19 contains a powerful picture of international alliances that defy expectations. By the end of the chapter, in verses (vv. 16–25) that are likely a later addition, the passage includes notice that both Egypt and Assur will be God's people, much like Israel (though whether this new arrangement is good or bad news for Egypt is debated).[1] As part of this process of

* I would like to thank Jeffrey Stackert and Chip Hardy for reading and offering feedback on the manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful insights and comments from the reviewers. All errors are mine alone.

[1] Scholars are fairly unanimous that these verses represent an addition, if not a series of additions. See below, however, for Shawn Zelig Aster's analysis of 19:20–25. As Nissinen states regarding this "repetitive formula," namely "on that day," it "is often interpreted as a marker of textual growth or different sources combined by the editor" (Martti Nissinen, *Prophetic Divination: Essays in Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy*, BZAW 494 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019], 589 n. 47). See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 317–19; J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 263. Blenkinsopp sees little connection between vv. 18ff with the oracles that preceded it other than Egypt as a central theme; the attitude expressed toward Egypt, however, is drastically different in his view. See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 161 n. 5. See also Roberts on how 19:1–15 and 16–17 do not anticipate 19:18. He argues that the subsequent section, 19:19–22, is both an earlier and independent expansion relative to 19:18 (Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 263).

For a survey of analyses of 19:16–25 and issues of redaction, engaging in Delitzsch, Vermeylen, Kaiser, Sweeney, and others, see the discussion in Jongkyung Lee, *A Redactional Study of the Book of Isaiah 13–23*, Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 159–61, esp. the bibliography in nn. 32–34. As Lee observes, a small number of scholars date this portion to the preexilic period, though a vast majority see these verses as from Persian if not Hellenistic periods. See Lee, *A Redactional Study of the Book of Isaiah 13–23*, 160 n. 34. For a reading of both the MT and LXX in light of aspects of identity in Ptolemaic Egypt, and for a reading that takes the chapter

entering into a covenant with YHWH, Isa 19:18 mentions that five cities in Egypt will "speak the lip of Canaan [מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן] and swear allegiance to YHWH of hosts [וְנִשְׁבָּעוֹת לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת]." The first phrase has occasioned much discussion, both because the terminology of "lip of Canaan" is odd and unclear and because it gives rise to questions about the semantics of שָׂפָה in Hebrew.[2] Given the historically well-attested link between language, politics, and identity, many have posited that the phrase bears witness to such broader, contextual factors.[3] As such, שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן often is translated as "language of Canaan," though what such a language might be has occasioned much interpretation.

In the following, I argue that one should not understand the first phrase, "to speak the lip of Canaan," without the second, "to swear allegiance to YHWH." In doing so, I concur with E. Haag and S. Lauber (see below) but offer additional evidence for the statement's translation as, "promise a vow with respect to Canaan," a proposal that merits consideration alongside others that have been offered for this difficult phrasing. Indeed, as evidenced by several other instances of the parallel use of the verbs ד־ב־ר and שׁ־ב־ע, most of which have to do with entering into a covenant with YHWH, the first verb is not simply a statement of speech, much less speech in a particular language.[4] Rather, the syntactically parallel ד־ב־ר and שׁ־ב־ע often function together, at least on one occasion, perhaps as a hendiadys, communicating the same idea jointly of a political relationship bound by stipulations and consequences, described in the Pentateuch through the use of these verbs as part of entering into the cove-

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in its entirety in this regard, see Bernd Schipper, "'The City by the Sea Will Be a Drying Place': Isaiah 19:1–25 in Light of Prophetic Texts from Ptolemaic Egypt," in *Monotheism in Late Prophetic and Early Apocalyptic Literature: Studies of the Sofja Kovalevskaja Research Group on Early Jewish Monotheism Vol. III*, ed. Nathan MacDonald and K. Brown, FAT 2.72 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 25–56.

[2] On the meaning of שָׂפָה, see Yael Landman, "On Lips and Tongues in Ancient Hebrew," *VT* 66 (2016): 66–77; Cian Power, *The Significance of Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible*, FAT 2.138 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023): 33–36. Both offer invaluable insights into the meaning of the lexeme, even if the conclusions of this study would refine their approaches.

[3] For such connections of nation, politics, and language, see the various contributions in Seth L. Sanders, ed., *Margins of Writing, Origins of Culture*, OIS 2 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2006). Blenkinsopp states that Hebrew referred to in this verse as the שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן is "at least" for liturgical purposes, if not for more official transactions. He takes the "swearing allegiance" to YHWH as an administrative tool, "in forensic affairs and in sealing contracts—a situation amply illustrated in the Elephantine papyri" (Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 318).

[4] See a similar idea of "vertical grammar" as applied to Ugaritic in D. T. Tsumura, "Vertical Grammar of Parallelism in Ugaritic Poetry," in *"Like ʾIlu Are You Wise": Studies in Northwest Semitic Languages and Literatures in Honor of Dennis G. Pardee*, ed. H. H. Hardy, Joseph Lam, and Eric D. Reymond, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 73 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2022), 269–81.

nant with YHWH.[5] In the cases where the verbs are not directly conjoined, the parallel syntax, context, and meaning still clearly relates the other examples to Isa 19:18 and sheds light on the interpretation of the latter. After reviewing previous proposals for שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן, I analyze the other passages in the Hebrew Bible in which this verbal pairing occurs, none of which involve actual speaking of a distinct language for the verb ד־ב־ר, which is instead better translated as "promise" in these passages.[6] In each case, the covenant with YHWH is the central concern. I then present cognate evidence for terms of speech and lips, especially in Akkadian, to support the interpretation of the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן offered here. I conclude with observations about what both the syntax of ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע mean together in Isa 19:18 in light of these parallels and cognate evidence, and I explore how this examination reframes the possibility of what שָׂפָה means as a lexeme generally.

PREVIOUS PROPOSALS FOR ISA 19:18

One is hard-pressed to find an interpretation of שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן that does not involve "language."[7] Stefan Lauber, for example, states that almost all interpreters prior to E. Haag's 1994 proposal (and almost all since with a few notable exceptions) take the phrase to refer to an actual language. Wildberger, Beuken, Schniedewind, and others see it as a label for Hebrew.[8] I return

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[5] For the importance of the idea of a "covenant" in the Hebrew Bible and scholarly research on it, see Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[6] The concept of a "promise" as an alternate translation for בְּרִית is noteworthy here. For the distinctives of P's use of this term, and for how it is unilateral in P, and for how translators tend to read D's concept into P's use of the lexeme, see Joel S. Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105.

[7] The question at hand is not whether "speech" of some sort is involved (see the proposals below), but whether "language" in the sense of discrete systems like Spanish, German, and Latin is entailed.

[8] So Lauber ("'JHWH wird sich Ägypten zu erkennen geben, und die Ägypter werden an jenem Tag JHWH erkennen' (Jes 19, 21): Universalismus und Heilszuversicht in Jes 19, 16–25," *ZAW* 123 [2011]: 370) argues that the meaning "language" for שָׂפָה has been "assumed by almost all interpreters" ("wie von nahezu allen Auslegern angenommen"). See some exceptions cited below (as with Schipper's article), but it is still a pervasive connection. Wildberger argued that it could refer to either Aramaic or Hebrew, but that likely Hebrew was meant (*Jesaja*, 3 vols., BKAT 10/1–10/3 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1972], 1:268–70; see also Siegfried Kreuzer, *The Bible in Greek: Translation, Transmission, and Theology of the Septuagint*, SCS 63 [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015], 13). Schniedewind identifies in this phrasing the first label for the language Hebrew (*A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period*, AYBRL [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013], 124). Mark Smith also operates under a similar assumption and sees in this verse an ancient awareness of the relationship between Canaanite and Hebrew, albeit from a postexilic setting (*The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* [Grand

to Haag and Lauber again at the end of the article. On the other hand, and as many have remarked, the eventual presence of a Jewish colony at Elephantine writing in Aramaic has resonances with the ideology of this verse, as does the Hellenistic Oniad temple at Leontopolis.[9] Perhaps, then, Aramaic could be in view. Moreover, in the Assyrian period the use of Akkadian as a symbolic language of governance in treaties and stelae deposited in subjugated territories also lends itself to the interpretation of a similar situation in Isa 19:18 involving language generally and alliances.

Given other putative examples of שָׂפָה meaning "language," this interpretation seemingly has a strong and unquestionable foundation. As an initial consideration, many of these instances involve the conjoined use of לָשׁוֹן, which on its own clearly means "language."[10] When not conjoined with לָשׁוֹן, the examples of שָׂפָה as "language" are fewer (such as Gen 11:1–7; Zeph 3:9; Ps 81:6), and many of these have been contested recently: though these attestations employ the noun for "speech" as a general concept, good arguments exist that the lexeme perhaps should not be translated as "language" in any of these passages.[11] Still, one might appeal to the lexical entries of שָׂפָה in

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Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002], 21). Likewise, Wim Beuken argues that Isa 19:18 likely refers to Hebrew (*Jesaja 13–27*, HThKAT [Freiburg: Herder, 2007], 192). See also recently Jeffrey H. Tigay and Adele Berlin, eds., *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization,* vol. 1: *Ancient Israel from its Beginnings through 332 BCE* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), xli; B. Puvaneswaran, *Sprache in der Geschichte: Etappen der Erforschung des Biblischen Hebräisch*, BZAW 540 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 24 n. 103.

[9] See the discussion with the review of literature in Csaba Balogh, *Stele of YHWH in Egypt: The Prophecies of Isaiah 18–20 concerning Egypt and Cush*, OtSt 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 251–60.

[10] For example, שָׂפָה is conjoined with לָשׁוֹן in Isa 28:11; 30:27; 33:19; and 59:3. In these cases, not all of which pertain to language even on a surface level (such as Isa 59:3), שָׂפָה appears as directly conjoined or in parallel with לָשׁוֹן. The same tendency applies to passages in Ezekiel (such as Ezek 3:6), the Psalms (where the terms are often used in parallel, though often the meaning is not "language" in the sense of a grammatical sense for either, as in Ps 140:4), and Proverbs (as in Prov 17:4). See also the note below.

[11] Samuel L. Boyd, "Sargon's Dūr-Šarrukīn Cylinder Inscription and Language Ideology: A Reconsideration and Connection to Genesis 11:1–9," *JNES* 78 (2019): 87–111; Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 33–36. The voice in Ps 81:6 that the narrator does not understand is the divine voice that follows, not the Egyptian language. For the arguments regarding how the phrase שְׂפַת לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי אֶשְׁמָע refers to the divine voice and not a language, see the translation and arguments in Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: Psalms 51–100*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 319–23. The note in 81:6 about שׁמע, "hearing," relates not to comprehending a foreign language, but whether or not the speaker of the Psalm and Israel historically understands, hears, and obeys the divine voice as is clear in 81:9–12. As such, the lead into the divine voice is not about a foreign language being understood, but about whether the divine voice is heeded. The reference of שָׂפָה בְּרוּרָה in Zeph 3:9 likewise, despite reception

most dictionaries and the historical usages of language politically to ground an interpretation of the clause in Isa 19:18 as referring to "language."

Yet despite these considerations that give the appearance of a concrete and uncontroversial translation of the phrase, little consensus has arisen on what it means. The previously proposed semantic options for the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן can be listed in at least three general categories. Cian Power has helpfully enumerated them, though at least one other complexity can be added.[12] Discussing the difficulties of the phrasing is key prior to examining the previous proposals since the very lack of consensus in scholarly discussion is itself an outgrowth of these same complexities.

First is the observation that, in ancient sources, "Canaan" typically refers to a region and not a language.[13] Though one finds "Canaanites" as people in the Hebrew Bible and in other

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history, does not concern language, but rather ethical manners of speech. The closest parallel phrasing occurs in Job 33:3, in which ברר and שָׂפָה evoke sincerity of speech, in contrast to the deceit of Zeph 3:13. Again, parallel syntax (so Job 33:3) and rhetorical contexts within Zeph 3 (so vs. 13) indicate that Zeph 3:9 does not describe a "pure" language, but rather ethical speech so that one can, with unified action (שֶׁכֶם אֶחָד), serve the Lord, perhaps not unlike the service (at an altar) and divinely approved disposition envisioned in Isa 19:18. For Zeph 3:9 as about something other than "language," see H. Irsigler, *Zefanja*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 376; Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah*, AB 25A (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 133.

For passages such as Isa 33:19 and Ezek 3:5–7, שָׂפָה occurs as a term for unintelligible utterances that emerge from the mouth of foreign peoples (עַמְקֵי שָׂפָה), utterances that by context refer to language. Indeed, in both cases the note of the שָׂפָה of the foreign people is coupled with the description of their כִּבְדֵי לָשׁוֹן (in Ezek 3) and נִלְעַג לָשׁוֹן (in Isa 33). In other words, contra Isa 19:18 where שָׂפָה appears on its own, the conjoined use of לשון and context referring to foreign nations are what direct the reader to the concept of "language." Even in these verses, the clause with שָׂפָה can be translated with reference to what comes forth from the mouth (the content of speech) and not language, so the JPS ("speech too obscure to comprehend" for Isa 33:19 and "unintelligible speech" in Ezek 3 in contrast to the "difficult language," which is כִּבְדֵי לָשׁוֹן). In any event, the appearance of שָׂפָה in Isa 19:18 is in a distinct and dissimilar syntax by not being conjoined with לָשׁוֹן.

The distinction is most clear in Ezek 36:3, in which the clause וַתֵּעָלוּ עַל־שִׂפַת לָשׁוֹן וְדִבַּת־עָם is particularly instructive. In this clause, שָׂפָה and לָשׁוֹן are not the same, but rather the first modifies the second. The lexeme שָׂפָה refers to the gossip or content of speech in every language (לָשׁוֹן), but שָׂפָה itself is not a language. The conjoined וְדִבַּת־עָם confirms this understanding, in which the parallel to שָׂפָה is דִּבָּה, "gossip" or what comes from the mouth, and "people," which (as in the Table of Nations in Gen 10 in the P portions, Gen 10:5, 20, and 31) can be characterized as having a language, or לָשׁוֹן. In any event, the distinction between the words is clearer in Ezek 36:3 where they are not conjoined, synonymous, or parallel, but rather one modifies the other as a *romen regens* (שְׂפַת) and *nomen rectum* (לָשׁוֹן).

[12] Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 45–47.

[13] Indeed, the fifteen-century BCE King Idrimi of Alalakh states that he fled to the "land of Canaan," a region distinct from Alalakh.

contemporaneous literature, even here the label and designation classifies an individual from this region.[14] Second, the term "Canaan" includes, in the designation elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, a diversity of peoples.[15] This designation at times includes recognition of distinct languages with no hint of relation among them.[16] One might counter that the title for Jabin in Judg 4:2 and 4:23–24 is "king of Canaan," in which case it can refer to a specific people perhaps with a specific language. In these verses, he is said to live in Hazor. Yet even this example fails to provide evidence for any cultural or political unity. For example, elsewhere (Josh 11:1) Jabin is simply king of Hazor (a self-sustained and well-attested kingdom). In the same scene in Judges (5:19), the "kings of Canaan" (plural) are said to oppose Barak under the leadership of Sisera.[17] The term is a general word that collects

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[14] For an Ugaritic text and discussion of the "Canaanite" who appears in it, the label carrying the gentilic ending in parallel with an Egyptian and Ashdodite, see Anson F. Rainey, "A Canaanite at Ugarit," *IEJ* 13 (1963): 43–45. The same gentilic as a "Canaanite" to designate people appears in the Hebrew Bible multiple times, as in Shua the daughter of a Canaanite (כְּנַעֲנִי) in Gen 38:2. See also reference to the Canaanites in EA 9 line 19–20 in the Amarna Letters.

[15] Perhaps, most famously, the notice in Gen 12:6 that the "Canaanites were in the land" at the time of Abram, referring to the many nations that Israel would eventually conquer, is a prime example. Note that although "Canaanite" is in the singular in this verse (הכנעני), it is a class of noun that embeds a collective, group sense, as occurs often (see examples in B. K. Waltke and M. P. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], §7.2.2).

Sometimes the Canaanites are part of a list of the peoples in the land, as in Gen 13:7; 15:21; Exod 3:17; and elsewhere. For more on the history of the terms "Canaan" and "Canaanite," particularly as applied to the land whence they came, see M. Buck, *The Canaanites: Their History and Culture from Texts and Artifacts*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), esp. 3–5. See also R. Hess, "Canaan (PERSON)," in vol. 1 of *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 828; Ph. Schmitz, "Canaan (PLACE)," vol. 1 of *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 828–31.

[16] Most famously perhaps is the dialectal distinction in sibilants in Judg 12:6, which is given more political distinctiveness in the passage. Power also cites Deut 2:10, 20; and Deut 3:9. He correctly argues that יְהוּדִית is a differentiating label for the language of the southern kingdom of Judah, setting it apart even from the northern Israelite version as a distinct language. See Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 46.

[17] Perhaps "king of Canaan" serves as a larger extension of Hazor's influence, but not a unified political entity as such. See A. Malamat who argues that Hazor was the head of a larger Canaanite alliance, but Canaan here still refers to a plurality of political and cultural entities and not to a singular king over a singular kingdom ("Hazor 'The Head of All Those Kingdoms'," *JBL* 79 [1960]: 12–19). See Josh 11:10 for notice of this league with Hazor at the head.

The title "king of Canaan" in Judg 4:2 and 4:23–24 may also have a literary function. Smith and Bloch-Smith point out that there may be a play on the verb כנע, "subdue," in this chapter, as Israel ends up subduing their greatest enemy in this Canaanite league. Jabin also appears

in it a variety of groups, but without linking any overlapping cultural or linguistic elements as a commonality (the land being the common denominator).[18] Each, in the biblical rhetoric, has its own distinctive political, cultural, linguistic, and religious identity.[19] As such, it is not a given, nor would it be expected, for "language of Canaan" to be used to bring together distinct entities with a common language.

Third, Israel and Judah are typically contrasted with Canaanites, not lumped together with them, whereas the term in Isa 19:18 indicates that the "lip of Canaan" includes Judah.[20] When people from the land of Canaan are mentioned, Israel and Judah are meant to be kept apart. Such a distinction is not entirely hard-and-fast, as one can find plenty of examples of Canaanites who marry into the community of Israel and Judah. The most famous exogenous union like this is Ruth, a Moabitess (not strictly from a Canaanite nation), though Shua, a Canaanite, was also a mother to the patriarch Judah's sons (Gen 38:2; 1 Chron 2:3). Additionally, Jerusalem and its inhabitants are connected genealogically to the Canaanites in Ezek 16:3.[21] Yet despite these evidences of the relationship between inhabitants of the land of Canaan and Israelites and Judahites (without also adding the archaeological evidence that indicates that Israel originated from Canaanites as well), the biblical texts are mostly at pains to keep Israel and Judah distinct culturally, politically, and religiously.[22] Indeed, when kings in Israel and Judah begin to act too much like Canaanites, they become the object of disapproval by the

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in Ps 83:10 (without a title) and could be an archetypal enemy of Israel (not unlike Nineveh and Assyria for Jonah). In any event, Smith and Bloch-Smith state that "king of Canaan" is a "particular construal of this chapter," and may be a figure employed "to epitomize Israel's opponents of the premonarchic period" (*Judges 1–10:5*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021], 251).

[18] As Dozeman notes, "Canaan" can refer to a people and the land, but the identifying feature of the people is connection to the land and not specific cultural, political, or linguistic traits (*Joshua 1–12*, AB 6B [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015], 259–60).

[19] See, for example, Lewis' recent comments that "Canaanite Religion" is a "modern scholarly construct," and that "there never existed a unified 'Canaanite' religion" (Th. Lewis, *The Origin and Character of God: Ancient Israelite Religion through the Lens of Divinity* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2020], 253).

[20] Note, for example, the "curse of Canaan" in Gen 9:25. For Judah, see Isa 19:17.

[21] For a more thorough discussion, see W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979), 337–38.

[22] See citations in Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 46–47. For the archaeology of early Israel, see, among many other publications that could be cited, L. Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. M. D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 123–75; A. E. Killebrew, ed., *The Biblical Peoples and Ethnicity: An Archaeological Study of Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, and Early Israel, 1300–1100 B.C.E.*, ABS 9 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2005). The archaeological evidence and publications are voluminous.

biblical authors, whatever else the case of Israelite religion on the ground might have been.

An additional consideration pertains to Daniel Block's statement that the שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן could refer to a linguistic grouping of languages in the region, which all share certain features. This logic, however, is erroneous.[23] It presupposes that something like the modern, linguistic label "Canaanite," which has a distinctly modern genealogy when applied to dialect features, was shared in ancient times.[24] Naturally, one might posit some sort of grouping in antiquity in which languages like Hebrew, Moabite, Edomite, and Ammonite were linked, as Block does, without anachronistically positing that such a grouping functions like it would in modern linguistic categorization. Indeed, other than broad similarity, Block does not explicate the logic behind this grouping. Yet positing this sort of link based on broad similarities in antiquity as a contrast to Egyptian is, essentially, the same in principle as the more modern categorization of Canaanite languages, albeit the modern term derives specifically from the analysis of linguistic isoglosses shared in common instead of broad intelligibility.

It is, of course, the case that ancient authors understood some sort of relatedness genetically amongst these groups, as in Gen 9:18 and 15:6 for Canaanites (among others), Gen 19:37 (for the Moabites), Gen 25:30 and 36:9 (among others for the Edomites), and Gen 19:38 (for the Ammonites). Despite the projection of such family ties in the ancestral period, the languages employed seemed to have a distinctly national connection without any more general subgrouping.[25] In 2 Kgs 18:26, the di-

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[23] See Daniel I. Block, "The Role of Language in Ancient Israelite Perceptions of National Identity," *JBL* 103 (1984): 321–40, esp. 327. Power seems to follow in a similar vein with the idea of a *Dachsprache* (see below).

[24] For the genealogy of "Canaanite" in modern studies on dialect geography, see A. Goetze, "Is Ugaritic a Canaanite Dialect?" *Language* 17 (1941): 127–38; R. Voigt, "The Classification of Central Semitic," *JSS* 32 (1987): 1–21; Aaron Rubin and J. Huehnergard, "Phyla and Waves: Models of Classification of the Semitic Languages," in *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, ed. S. Weninger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 259–78. See the reference to Smith above, who argues similar to Block that Isa 19.18 reveals an awareness of shared linguistic heritage. The word "Aramaic" has a similar function, since the Arameans had no politically unified state, yet the word "Aramaic" for a number of local dialects (in the pre-Persian period) functions as a meaningful label. Despite the existence of a Canaanite alliance in Josh 11:10, there is no currently attested evidence that their languages were ever meaningfully grouped under such a general label like "Canaanite" or a "roof" label (see below) in this period (in the same manner that Lewis argues that there was no grouping of Canaanite religion in the ancient world; see note above). One might argue that this is evidence in Isa 19:18, but as shown below, there is a more convincing explanation of שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן in Isa 19:18.

[25] On the complexities of Neh 13:23–24 in the context of Persian period multilingualism and issues of intelligibility between dialects and languages of the time, see Felix Hagemeyer, "Melting Pot, Salad Bowl,

alect of Hebrew is called יְהוּדִית possibly because it was thought of as a distinct language from the northern variety (see the account in Isa 36:11);[26] on parallel, it is well attested that what modern linguists consider to be the two main dialects of Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian (called *aššurû/aššurāyu* and *akkadûm*, respectively), were, from the perspective of the ancients who employed them, two different languages.[27] Simply because languages shared features does not necessarily mean that ancients would see them as grouped together, particularly if political and other ideological factors would prevent such a grouping.

Considering these difficulties, is it possible to determine what the phrase "lip of Canaan" means? Other proposals have, like Block's statement, associated it with even more general, if also political, subgroupings that correspond to the land of Canaan. As stated above, though, such a thesis is anachronistic. This theory views the phrasing שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן as a *Dachsprache*, or "roof" language including Judean, and would also likely be ruled out. Though such a thesis has some merit, there is no attested or certain evidence of such larger groupings based on culture or politics in the land of Canaan (though Herodotus may signal such a concept for the Greek world).[28] Others have seen in this phrase an external assessment of languages in a region, as though the terminology could have an Egyptian origin reflecting on a

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Contact Zone? The Southern Coastal Plain of Israel/Palestine in the 5th–4th Century BCE," in *Multilingualism in Ancient Contexts: Perspectives from Ancient Near Eastern and Early Christian Contexts*, ed. Louis C. Jonker, Angelika Berlejung, and Izak Cornelius (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2021), 104–109 (and the literature cited therein).

[26] The differences between 2 Kgs 18:26 and Isa 36:11 are minor, such as the patronymic "son of Hilkiah" in 2 Kgs 18:26 and the prepositional variation between וְאַל תְּדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ יְהוּדִית in 2 Kgs 18:26 versus וְאַל תְּדַבֵּר אֵלֵינוּ יְהוּדִית in Isa 36:11.

[27] A. George, "Babylonian and Assyrian: A History of Akkadian," in *Languages of Iraq: Ancient and Modern,* ed. J.N. Postgate (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 2007), 31. A more general "speech (of the region of) Canaan" is no better, as such a translation still is not clear a) what such speech might be, b) why it is in relation to Canaan, and c) what it has to do with the larger literary context of the oracle.

[28] For the concept of a *Dachsprache*, see Power, *The Significance of Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible*, 45–46. The Shibboleth episode in *Judges* pertains to how dialectal distinctions had real implications. Herodotus may employ such a concept for the Greeks in *The Histories*, 8.144. See, however, Gruen, who argues that this passage reflects a more Athenocentric and less pan-Hellenic conception (and who argues that Herodotus does not necessarily share the view espoused in this quote). E. Gruen, *Ethnicity in the Ancient World—Did it Matter?* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 42–55.

Williamson is close to this idea when he states that the term is a label for those in Egypt who will use an "esoteric" (to them) language such as Hebrew to identify with, and have an allegiance with, Canaan. See H. G. M. Williamson, "Egypt in the Book of Isaiah," in *Israel in Egypt: The Land of Egypt as Concept and Reality for Jews in Antiquity and the Early Medieval Period*, ed. A. Salvesen, S. Pearce, and M. Frenkel, AJEC 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 44–45.

perception of language in the land of Canaan.[29] Again, however, no currently available evidence exists for such a label as others have pointed out.[30] It could be simply a foil for Egyptian, though this proposal gets no closer to what exactly the שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן might be nor why other terms that could easily be such a foil (and are attested such as יְהוּדִית) are not employed.[31] Finally, a more recent suggestion sees in Isa 19:18 a move to establish language, the שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן, as a precursor, or perhaps attendant, condition to political attachment which occurs in the clause governed by the verb ש־ב־ע.[32] As seen below, however, the joint verbs ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע both evoke the agreements with legal stipulations as found in a variety of passages pertaining to the covenant between God and Israel. In this fashion, the phrases מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן and נִשְׁבָּעוֹת לַיהוָה צְבָאוֹת, conforming to this pattern, are both more likely to point to the realm of the political/contractual relationship with YHWH and not to two distinct, however theoretically related, concerns. Methodologically, it moves the question from a realm of hypothetical scenarios to attested usages of the same pattern elsewhere.

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[29] See E. Ullendorff, "Knowledge of Languages in the Old Testament," *BJRLM* 44 (1961–62): 456; Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH in Egypt*, 297 (as cited in Power, *The Significance of Linguistic Diversity in the Hebrew Bible*, 47). Balogh understands the "lip of Canaan" to refer to Judean Hebrew, given the phrase אַדְמַת יְהוּדָה in Isa 19:17, but that such an advent of Hebrew in Egypt is not viewed by the Egyptians as a positive development. Balogh's analysis of the political overtones of ש־ב־ע is well articulated and persuasive, but it makes the analysis of מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן appear all the more odd as a vaguely connected but nonetheless distinct act of speaking a language (however language and politics might be involved together). As Balogh notes, if שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן does refer to Hebrew, it is a unique phrase without parallel elsewhere. As argued below, both participles in Isa 19:18 work together to underscore a political (and nonlinguistic) situation, which allows for a more coherent interpretation of שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן. See Balogh, *The Stele of YHWH in Egypt*, 254–56. For Balogh, the prophecy in 19:18 is intricately connected to what goes before since the vision in 19:18, in his understanding, is not one of hope or redemption for Egypt, but rather a negative vision of subjugation. He takes the five cities, then, as symbolic of a larger whole in Egypt and not simply discrete municipal entities. The argument in this article is not the nature of the relationship, whether it is good or bad for Egypt, but simply that all the elements of Isa 19:18, given parallels elsewhere, describe entering into this relationship.

[30] See literature cited in the note above for this criticism.

[31] Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 47. See his citation of Block, "Role of Language," 327.

[32] So Power argues that language and religion are pieces of the "cultural property" of a nation (Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 104). He is correct to observe that both clauses reinforce a single idea, that of "political fealty," but I argue that the participial clauses in 19:18 of מְדַבְּרוֹת and נִשְׁבָּעוֹת are not distinct aspects of larger "cultural property" and two components to a political vision, but rather function together and drive at the same notion of entering into some form of relationship to Israel and its deity.

THE PATTERN ד־ב־ר AND ש־ב־ע AND ITS SEMANTICS

Having explored previous proposals, which all point to the oddity and lack of clear explanation for שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן on its own, it becomes manifest that a new way of approaching this phrase is warranted. What each of the previous proposals attempts is a focus on the more limited construction שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן, either on its own or as part of a rhetorical unit. When placed in a larger consideration of a pattern of verbs that appear together, a specific conjoining that elsewhere always describes how an entity (such as the patriarchs or Israel itself) comes into a covenant with the Israelite deity, fresh considerations emerge that allow for a more concrete interpretation not only of שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן but also of the larger unit to which it belongs.

Isaiah 19:18 states that five cities in Egypt will "speak," מְדַבְּרוֹת, and "swear," נִשְׁבָּעוֹת. The same subject applies to both. If the focus of analysis shifts from what מְדַבְּרוֹת governs, namely שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן, to instead where else these verbs appear in the same pattern (in parallel syntax, with the same subject, conjoined directly or at least somewhat proximately to one another in the same literary contexts), then a number of other passages from the Hebrew Bible can be brought into consideration when assessing what Isa 19:18 means. In each case, the same subject governs the verbs ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע, and each functions together to underscore the same idea: entering into or maintaining some aspect of a covenant relationship with the Israelite deity. Joel Baden has already noted the semantic overlap of the verbs in the context of swearing an oath in the Pentateuch, and as pertaining to the covenant between Israel and God. He states

> The simple verb *d-b-r*, "speak," is used to describe the making of a covenant or the act of swearing in biblical usage. In Deuteronomy, the phrases *ka'ašer nišba'* and *ka'ašer dibber* are used interchangeably to mean "as he promised/swore." Akkadian usage may also provide support: the words *qabû* and *zakāru*, both meaning "to speak," are also used to mean "promise," "swear," and "declare under oath."[33]

In the following, I trace not only the semantic overlap of the verbs, but their parallel appearance in a number of key texts with similar thematic content as appears in Isa 19:18.

If this pattern holds for other examples, where ד־ב־ר is usually translated not as "speak" but rather as "promise," then it has implications for Isa 19:18 and the enigmatic phrasing therein. Moreover, as argued below, this passage becomes another datum whereby traditionally the lexeme שָׂפָה has been mistakenly translated as "language." It moves the discussion away from a phrase attested nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible or cognate literature (שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן) and toward contextualizing the phrasing in Isa 19:18

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[33] Baden, *Promise to the Patriarchs*, 49. See also Baden, *Promise to the Patriarchs*, 175 n. 86, where he cites Weinfeld, "ברית, *bᵉrîth*," in vol. 2 of *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 253–79, esp. 257 and 260.

in light of other attested, and well-understood, passages with a similar rhetorical context.[34] If the verbs that order and provide structure to Isa 19:18 have specific meanings elsewhere, such as "promise" for ד־ב־ר considering similar rhetorical content, then it provides an anchor and a more reliable foundation for interpreting and translating Isa 19:18, particularly the otherwise unparalleled מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן.

THE PATTERN ELSEWHERE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

This pattern of a subject governing the conjoined verbs ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע occurs in several passages in the Hebrew Bible, all with the exception of one in the Pentateuch (see below on the syntactic issue of God as the subject of the verbs in contrast to Isa 19:18). All the Pentateuchal passages refer to the promise or covenant that God made with the patriarchs. Moreover, the examples derive from a variety of sources (non-P—or J and E—as well as D), and the passages in D evince no evidence of being simply the result of direct borrowing from its source texts, though one cannot rule out indirect influence of the idea from non-P texts.[35] Notably, none of the texts from the Pentateuch are from the actual narrative recounting of the establishment of the covenant, but rather the pattern functions as a reminder back to the initial event, though from a narrative setting later in time.[36]

GEN 24:7

In Gen 24:7, Abraham recounts his encounter with God in his home country. He does so in this passage to deter his servant from taking Isaac to Abraham's home country if a woman is not willing to make the trek to where Abraham and Isaac are in the land of Canaan. The logic of Gen 24:6–7 is that Isaac remaining

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[34] From a cognate perspective, as mentioned more below, the Proto-Semitic noun refers to the lip as a body part and takes on an association of related meanings and semantic extensions, such as "edge, bank (of a river/stream." For a convenient grouping of this evidence, see *HALOT* 3: 1346–47. The argument here does not question this basic sense from comparative languages, nor the fact that in Hebrew the lexeme refers to "speech" and utterances such as a vow. Rather, the question is the specific semantic domain, when the word is used on its own and not with לָשׁוֹן, of "language" in the sense of Spanish, German, or Latin as discrete languages. The lexeme לָשׁוֹן carries this meaning on its own in Hebrew and in related languages.

[35] J. Baden, "The Deuteronomic Evidence for the Documentary Theory," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. T. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch Schwartz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 327–44. The results of the analysis of Isa 19:18 in light of these Pentateuchal passages do not change depending on one's theory of the development of the Torah. In other words, any model, whether Neo-Documentarian or tradition historical, would arrive at the same conclusions for Isa 19:18. One could just as easily use "non-P" or "J and E," and arrive at the same conclusions.

[36] Oath language appears in Gen 22:16, but all subsequent mentions of the promise reflect back on earlier events, at times using oath language as in the examples below (Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 97).

in the land is part of Abraham's call and all the promises that God made to Abraham as a result.[37] Partially quoting from Gen 12:1–3 (the notice of בֵּית אָבִי and אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי in 24:7 and the overlap with the same terms in Gen 12:1) and partially from 12:7 (לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת), the connection of the relationship between God and Abraham, the promise to give the land to his descendants, and the command for Isaac not to travel back to Abraham's homeland are related concerns in Gen 24:6–7, all of which belong to non-P (or, J in Neo-Documentarian terms).[38] It is in this context that the pattern ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע occurs:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקָחַנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וַאֲשֶׁר
דִּבֶּר־לִי וַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע־לִי לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח
מַלְאָכוֹ לְפָנֶיךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לִבְנִי מִשָּׁם׃

> YHWH god of the heavens who took me from the house of my father and from my birthplace and who promised to me and swore to me, "To your offspring I will give this land," he will send his angel before you and you will take a wife for my son there.

Most translations render the parallel verbs separately (or, in the JPS, "promised me on oath") though the NLT translates the pattern as a verbal hendiadys ("solemnly promise").[39] Like Isa 19:18, the literary context refers to entering into a relationship with the Israelite deity and the connection to land that attends to that relationship.[40] The same subject and syntactic structure parallels both clauses, much like Isa 19:18 as well. This passage is, in addition, notable for the multiple horizons of oaths that occur. In Gen 24:7, Abraham recounts the promise God gave to him, and in Gen 24:8–9 an oath and its ritual (putting the hand under the thigh) between Abraham and his servant also occurs. In the latter

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[37] Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1995), 385.

[38] Westermann takes the passage as late since it focuses on the promise of land, a theme that he elsewhere identifies as late (Westermann, *Genesis*, trans. D. E. Green [New York: T & T Clark, 2004], 324). Baden, however, sees a connection not to a late layer but rather to the references earlier in Gen 12.1–3, 7 in J (J. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis*, AYBRL [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012], 71, 268 n. 51).

[39] For this notion of a verbal hendiadys, and examples that resemble the NLT translation above, see B. T. Arnold and J. H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 148.

[40] As Baden states, this is the "first reference to a previously given oath," and "the promise referred to is unquestionably that of Gen 12:7" (Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 49–50). Marc Brettler observes that ש־ב־ע appears in this verse for the first time applied to the land promise (M. Brettler, "Promise of the Land of Israel to the Patriarchs," *Shnaton* 5–6 [1983]: vii-xxiv, esp. xx). As he notes, later texts such as Pss 89:4 and 132:2 reflect back on the promise to David in 2 Sam 7:8, but the verses in the Psalms use ש־ב־ע to identify the nature of this promise whereas 2 Sam 7:8 lacks this word.

verses, the promise formulation contains the verb שׁ־ב־ע and the nominal דָּבָר (see below the discussion of Num 30:3 and Ezra 10:5 for the same construction with human vows directed to God).[41]

EXOD 32:13

Another reference to the covenant with the patriarchs appears in non-P in Exod 32:13 (attributed to E in Neo-Documentarianism). In this passage, the order of the pattern is switched relative to Gen 24, with שׁ־ב־ע first followed by ד־ב־ר. Nonetheless, the same subject (God) governs both verbs, though spoken in the second person as Moses addresses God directly after the debacle of the Golden Calf:

זְכֹר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בָּךְ
וַתְּדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם אַרְבֶּה אֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ
הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֶתֵּן לְזַרְעֲכֶם וְנָחֲלוּ לְעֹלָם׃

> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel your servants, how you swore to them by yourself and you promised them, "I will make your seed great, like the stars of the heavens, and all this land which I promised I will give to your seed and they will inherit (it) forever."

One possible reading of the syntax here is not strictly according to the pattern identified above, but rather as the verb of speech, ד־ב־ר, simply introducing direct discourse. In this case, the parallel may not carry over the semantics of שׁ־ב־ע to ד־ב־ר, the latter meaning "saying" to introduce the direct speech, in which case the verb א־מ־ר, governed by אֲשֶׁר like נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ, could mean "promise" (as in a number of modern translations such as the NRSV and ESV).[42] The parallel syntax, though, still appears in both clauses, with שׁ־ב־ע modified by prepositional phrase then conjoined with ד־ב־ר also modified by a prepositional phrase. Entering into the direct speech, then, one can still understand and translate ד־ב־ר as part of the pattern: "which you swore to them by yourself and you promised them, 'I will increase your seed….'" The content is closely related to Gen 24:7, though Exod 32:13 has similar phrasing as Gen 22:16, both of which are

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[41] See also similar formulations of oaths in Josh 2:20; 1 Kgs 22:16/2 Chr 18:15; Neh 5:12.

[42] The verb א־מ־ר may also function in this sense in Judg 2:1, though in this verse there is no closely linked syntactic pattern to שׁ־ב־ע (rather the context of the covenant brings the sense "promise" to א־מ־ר here). There is a parallel in 2 Kgs 25:24 between שׁ־ב־ע and א־מ־ר, both of which govern לָהֶם, but in this case the verbs function as simply narrative actions in the main line of prose discourse. The use of א־מ־ר in oathtaking, parallel to שׁ־ב־ע, does occur in Amos 8:14, but without the parallel syntax observed in the examples above. I have found no other examples of א־מ־ר and שׁ־ב־ע in parallel syntax, closely conjoined, and in the context of entering into the covenant with YHWH as in the examples presented above for ד־ב־ר and שׁ־ב־ע.

ascribed to E in Neo-Documentarian research.[43] Both Exod 32:13 and Gen 24:7 are passages similar in content to Isa 19:18 in which Egypt comes into a relationship with the Israelite deity, though Exod 32:13 contains a unique feature of conflating all three patriarchs in the phrasing, which does not occur elsewhere.[44]

DEUT 19:8

The pattern appears in D in Deut 19:8 in the context of the discussion of allotment of the cities of refuge. The text specifies that when Israel's borders expand in accordance with the promise that God made to the patriarchs, then they will set aside three cities where those who unintentionally committed manslaughter may flee. This passage is itself an innovation of centralization since the source text in the Covenant Code in Exod 21:12–14 allowed for flight to a local altar. As those localized altars do not exist and are not allowed in D's legal and religious vision, the place of refuge becomes a matter of strategically-placed cities in the land of Israel and in the Transjordanian territories. Given that the scope is now contingent on the matter of expansion of the land, D includes the divine promise that God made to the ancestors (which is absent from the source text in the Covenant Code since in Exod 21:12–14 several local altars can serve this function).

The verse of relevance for this discussion about the cities of refuge is:

> וְאִם־יַרְחִיב יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת־גְּבֻלְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ וְנָתַן לְךָ
> אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָתֵת לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ׃
>
> When YHWH your God expands your territory just as he swore to your fathers, and (when) he gives to you all the land which he promised to give to your fathers…

The clauses with ש־ב־ע and ד־ב־ר are not directly conjoined, but nonetheless appear in parallel subordinated clauses ("just as" and "which," respectively), both of which modify the promise of land to the patriarchs. Indeed, the two parts of the verse are directly related to one another: "when" the territory of land enlarges "just as (YHWH) swore to you forefathers," and, as either a result or synonymous (also temporal and conditional) statement, when God "gives to you all the land which he promised to give your forefathers," then at that point Israel is to designate cities of refuge across the Transjordan in addition to the three already allotted in the land earlier in the chapter (Deut 19:1–7).[45]

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[43] For arguments against viewing Exod 32:13 as Deuteronomistic, see Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 33, 76.

[44] Baden argues that the content is known to all promise texts, even as "no author attributes the same divine speech to all three patriarchs," making Exod 32:13 "a clear case of patriarchal conflation" (Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 94).

[45] On the peculiarity of D's use of these phrases, and how they point to a "unique formula to indicate the sources which it assumes are

The parallel use of the verbs in the context of the covenant relationship to God and the attendant disposition of land, then, matches the pattern seen above.[46] Elsewhere in D, in Deut 9:5, a reflex of the pattern appears in the use of the noun דָּבָר modified by the relative clause אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב, displaying, as in the case of Gen 24:9; Num 30:3; and Ezra 10:5, an instance in which דָּבָר clearly means "oath" and appears syntactically with שׁ־ב־ע (see also Eccl 8:2).

DEUT 29:12

Appearing after the terms of the covenant in Deut 28, Deut 29 provides a rehearsal of divine deeds to bring Israel where they are, and a call for that current generation to be part of the covenant no less than their forefathers were historically before it. The phrasing is as follows:

לְמַעַן הָקִים־אֹתְךָ הַיּוֹם לוֹ לְעָם וְהוּא יִהְיֶה־לְּךָ לֵאלֹהִים כַּאֲשֶׁר
דִּבֶּר־לָךְ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֶיךָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב׃

> That he may establish you this day as his people, and that he may be your God, just as he promised you and just as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Here again the pattern occurs of ד־ב־ר plus שׁ־ב־ע, further confirming the consistent phrasing as it relates to the covenant with the Israelite deity. In Deut 29:12, the focus is not on the promise of land narrowly so conceived but rather on the relationship and covenant established with Israel's ancestors itself, which has implications for the promise of land in D.[47] The way the pattern ד־ב־ר and שׁ־ב־ע enfolds the cross-generational nature of this covenant is notable. Unlike Gen 24:7, in which both verbs governed a prepositional constituent that had the same object ("to me," from Abraham's perspective), in Deut 29:12 the verbs govern different generations. The phrase דִּבֶּר־לָךְ addresses the present audience, whereas נִשְׁבַּע incorporates the founding generations of the covenant, thereby manifesting the enfolding of past, present, and future that is such a key feature of Deuteronomy.[48]

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so obvious to the reader that there is no need to quote them," see Milgrom, "Profane Slaughter and a Formulaic Key to the Composition of Deuteronomy," *HUCA* 47 (1976): 3–4 (quote at 4).

[46] As many have recognized, the promise in D focuses on land (though see Deut 29:12 below) and is phrased as an oath. Baden argues that the focus on land makes sense: Israel is on the precipice of taking the land, which is therefore the logical focus (Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 96).

[47] E. Otto, *Das Deuteronomium im Pentateuch und Hexateuch: Studien zur Literaturgeschicthe von Pentateuch und Hexateuch im Lichte des Deuteronomiumrahmens*, FAT 30 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 150 n. 168. The oath referred to in Deut 29:12 does not have a clear antecedent in D's text, but may refer to Deut 10:15. See Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 48.

[48] Stackert, *Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch*, AYRBL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 116. This is not to argue for blurring "the gap between generations" as does Weinfeld in reference to Deut 11:2

JUDG 2:15

Judges 2:15 recounts how Israel was defeated each time they engaged in battle. Their defeats are the result of abandoning the covenant with YHWH (Judg 2:3), the basis of which, and the Israelite rejection of which, is recounted in Judg 2:1–5, followed by the description of the death of Joshua. The subsequent generation continued to disregard the covenant with God, and their failures are attributed to this neglect in Judg 2:15.

בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ יַד־יְהוָה הָיְתָה־בָּם לְרָעָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה
וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לָהֶם וַיֵּצֶר לָהֶם מְאֹד׃

> Everywhere they went out, the hand of YHWH was against them for evil, just as YHWH promised and just as YHWH swore to them, and it was terribly distressing for them.

The immediate context of what God promised and swore connects back to Judg 2:3, in which, through the mouth of the angel, God declares that he will no longer fight for Israel since they constantly align themselves with the people and practices that they should oppose.[49] This section is also laden with how such divine abandonment and defeat connects to the more fundamental relationship with Israel, making the parallel syntax of דִּבֶּר and נִשְׁבַּע more notable (as directly conjoined clauses governed by כַּאֲשֶׁר).

All of the examples above shed light on a meaningful pattern that can explain Isa 19:18. Yet, at least superficially, there are important distinctions that need to be addressed. The construction in Isa 19:18 מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן entails a proximate accusative/transitive relation between the verb to speak and what is spoken. In other words, the object of what is spoken follows the verb of speech immediately. The syntax of the examples elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible differs, at least somewhat, in that no object follows immediately. One can overcome this obstacle, however, by observing that there is a parallel in a number of verses above: just as the content of what is spoken (the שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן) appears immediately following the verb of speech, so also the content of the promise appears after the pattern generally in Gen 24:7 and the verb ד־ב־ר specifically in Exod 32:13. Moreover, accusatival constructions, as in Isa 19:18, linguistically entail an inherent adverbial component, since objects modify the verb

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(he also cites 29:13–14; see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 442). As Stackert has argued, D originally had no change of generation, in which case the generation addressed is the same as the Exodus generation (J. Stackert, "The Wilderness Period without Generation Change: The Deuteronomic Portrait of Israel's Forty-Year Journey," *VT* 70 [2020]: 696–721). Yet the reference in Deut 29:14 to "those not here" nonetheless enfolds future generations as equally responsible for the relationship and maintenance of the covenant.

[49] Baden posits a link back to Deut 28 (Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 48).

in some manner.[50] Likewise, the כַּאֲשֶׁר "just as" clauses in Deut 19:8; 29:12; and Judg 2:15 function as adverbial modifiers for the promise pattern. Finally, in Deut 19:8, the relative "which" (אֲשֶׁר) functions as the object of the embedded clause (the land is the object of what God promised, and the verb for promise here is ד־ב־ר). The parallel is by no means precise, but nor is it entirely distinct.

COGNATE EVIDENCE FOR שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן

Given the pattern observed above, ד־ב־ר in these contexts, as well as in Isa 19:18, should likely not be seen as a reference to speaking a language, which would therefore require, then, a different translation of שָׂפָה. In this section, I consider avenues of cognate evidence to provide a better sense of the phrase in Isa 19:18 itself. A number of such considerations not only point away from שָׂפָה in Isa 19:18 as "language" but also point toward related constructions elsewhere, particularly in Akkadian. The point is not to argue for contact between Akkadian and biblical Hebrew but rather to show how similar ways of phrasing an "utterance of the lip" in these texts can shed light on מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן in Isa 19:18.

As Block claims, there is no good cognate evidence in other Semitic languages for words related to שָׂפָה meaning "language."[51] A possible exception is Samaritan Aramaic. Abraham Tal lists two entries for שָׂפָה as "language" in his dictionary.[52] The first is from the Samaritan Aramaic version of the Tower of Babel, which (see notes below) has recently been argued not to be about languages, and in any case is not an independent datum in Aramaic given the influence of interpretive traditions regarding the biblical text. The second, however, is from a later text, the תיבת מרקה, or *Tibåt Mårqe*. This composition is attributed to a fourth-century CE thinker Marqe, though it is known only in manuscripts that date to the beginning of the 14th century CE and later. The lateness of this attestation makes it of limited value for the semantics of the biblical text.[53]

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[50] See the functions of the accusative as adverbial modifiers in Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §4.6.2 and §10.1.a.

[51] Block, "Role of Language," 323.

[52] A. Tal, *A Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic*, HdO 50, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 919.

[53] In this text, which is a Samaritan midrashic collection of stories retelling the Pentateuch, a passage appears in which the "language of Hebrew," שפת עברהותה, is identified, potentially using שָׂפָה to mean "language." A closer look at the context, however, reveals a different interpretation. The passage in question is

> כד אתחזי לה אלה בגו סניה אשכח קדמיו כתיב תרים ועסרים כתבים באש אכלה דבם ביר משה ארהותה והי עקרי מלי שפת עברהותה נעמינה כד כתב ארהותה...
>
> When God appeared to him in the midst of the bush, he found twenty two letters written before him with consuming fire; by means of these Moses wrote the law. They are the fundamentals of the words of the utterance of Hebrew. Let us contemplate him writing the To-

The data are scant for inscriptional evidences of שָׂפָה and its cognates in Northwest Semitic inscriptions.[54] The word appears in Ugaritic literature, where it can refer to an utterance, or what comes forth from the lips (a common semantic domain across Semitic languages).[55] Much of the relevant data exist in Akkadian texts from a variety of periods. In these texts, a number of constructions of the lexeme *šaptum* appear in which the meaning of the phrase and its contexts closely resemble the Hebrew phrasing in Isa 19:18.

For example, in a treaty text from Esarhaddon's reign, the phrase "utterance of the lips" occurs.[56] The language of oathtaking in Akkadian texts is particularly notable. As Baden observed

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rah….

For text and translation, see A. Tal, *Tibåt Mårqe: The Ark of Marqe Edition, Translation, Commentary*, SJ 92 (Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 532–34. The notice of the שפת עברהותה appears in the midst of a discussion of the writing of Hebrew, and the text continues to analyze specific letters and their formation. The same phrasing appears earlier as עקרי מלי עברהותה, without שָׂפָה. "Foundations," or עקרין, as a concept occurs in several occasions, often as mysterious ruminations or elemental knowledge indicating aspects of great importance. The only other appearance of עקרי מלי happens in reference to Torah itself (Tal, *Tibåt Mårqe*, 532). Hebrew, as a result, is not so much a language as it is equal to revelation from Sinai and mysteries of ultimate import. In any event, the letters of the alphabet in this passage are not Hebrew themselves, but the foundations, or bases, of the utterance (שָׂפָה) of Hebrew, drawing a contrast between writing and speech, but not necessarily using שָׂפָה as a lexeme to mean "language" in the sense of a distinct linguistic system. For a further reflection on the distinction between script and speech, see b. Sanh 21b, in which the holy language can be written in עברית, or paleo-Hebrew, or אשורית, the Assyrian or Aramaic script. Indeed, when the *Tibåt Mårqe* refers to human language, it elsewhere employs לשון, as in לשון ביש, the "evil language" which refers to the Egyptian language (Tal, *Tibåt Mårqe*, 62). In any event, this singular possible attestation is very late to be considered relevant for the biblical usages (including contemporaneous texts), and even here the lexeme may not mean "language."

[54] See J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling, *Dictionary of the Northwest Semitic Inscriptions*, HdO 21, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2:1181.

[55] Note also the divine appetite, described in RS 2.002 v 63 (KTU^3 1.23 v 63), and restored in RS 2.[022] ii 2–3 (KTU^3 1.5 ii 2–3) as a god or goddess putting a lip to the skies and a lip to the underworld. Ugaritic also contains phrasing somewhat similar to the Akkadian, such as *ṣåt špth*, "expression of his mouth" and *hwt b špth*, "the word of his lips." For attestations, see G. Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Traditions*, HdO 112, 2 vols., 3rd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2:826.

[56] The phrase is *tamītu ša dabābti šapti*, "oath of the speech of the lips." See S. Parpola and K. Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths*, SAA 2 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1988), text 2, line 386.

(see quote above), but as was linguistically unpacked by Blane Conklin, the terms and verbs are both peculiar with swearing (*tamû*) and speaking (*ẓakāru*).[57] Conklin further identifies the concepts behind such oathtaking as the following: "it appears plausible that oath-taking was partly conceived as not merely an act of speaking but an entry into a sworn state through vicarious means including speaking."[58] Hence, in Esarhaddon's treaty cited above, the act of oath-taking includes the "utterance of the lips," which itself indicated a deeper commitment in the "heart" (though it certainly also included the act of speaking from the lip).

Other Akkadian constructions more specifically resemble the phrasing מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן and evoke this idea of utterances of the lip that involve promises and oaths. From the time of Assurbanipal, a hymn to Ištar of Nineveh and Arbela includes an expression of the enduringness and veracity of their promises. The phrasing is *ẓikir šaptēšina gīru napḫu atmûšina kunnū ana dāriš*, "A word from their lips is blazing fire, their utterances are valid forever!"[59] A number of other attestations of *ẓikir šapti*, "word/utterance of the lip," also involve aspects of commands, promises, or orders from the divine or royal realm from a number of periods (particularly concentrated, however, in the Neo-Assyrian era).[60] These examples parallel the phrasing in Isa 19:18 of ד־ב־ר and שָׂפָה, also in a context in which promises, allegiances, and binding relationships are formed.

An evaluation of the comparative evidence reveals, then, that there is no cognate to Hebrew שָׂפָה that clearly means "language," though there are analogous expressions of the lexeme used to express oath-making, swearing, and entering a treaty or covenant. These idioms in Akkadian involve similar components as the enigmatic phrasing in Isa 19:18, namely the word for speaking, *ẓikrum*, and the lexeme "lip," שָׂפָה or *šaptum*. When one explores cognate evidence, the semantic equivalence for "lip" appears readily in Akkadian for the same literary contexts as the passages above in which verbs the verbs ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע evoke the concept of "promise" as it pertains to the Israelite covenant with the patriarchs. The use of these verbs with the additional appearance of שָׂפָה as governed by ד־ב־ר, analogous to *ẓikru* governing *šaptu*, makes the Akkadian cognate evidence helpful

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[57] It should be noted that the Hebrew cognate to Akkadian *ẓakāru* naturally develops into the meaning "remember," as in the Sabbath command in Exod 20:8. Yet even here, there exists in many usages of the Hebrew a notion of something more active than "remember," as examined recently in T. Hogue, "Enchant the Sabbath Day to Make it Holy: Conjuration and Performativity in Exodus 20:8–11," in *New Perspectives on Ritual in the Biblical World*, ed. L. Quick and M. Ramos, LHB/OTS 702 (New York: T & T Clark, 2022), 139–57.

[58] B. Conklin, *Oath Formulas in Biblical Hebrew*, LSAWS 5 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 83.

[59] A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: University of Helsinki Press, 1989), text 3, line 6.

[60] See a number of attestations in CAD Z s.v. *ẓikru* A s. 3 and CAD Š *šaptu* s. 1d.

for defining the semantics of שָׂפָה in Isa 19:18 as pertaining to a binding utterance, command, or vow.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ISA 19:18

The accumulation of a variety of evidences, mostly concentrated in this article on the syntactic pattern and cognate evidence from Akkadian identified above, leads to the conclusion that שָׂפָה in Isa 19:18 most likely does not refer to a language. With the possible exception of Exod 32, where ד־ב־ר might function to introduce direct speech, the verb ד־ב־ר is modified by what is promised (the land—Gen 24:7; Exod 32:13 in one possible interpretation; Deut 19:8—or the establishment of the covenant itself—Deut 29:12—or to punish Israel for straying, as in Judg 2:15) as well as who receives the promise (so all examples). The complementizers of the relative pronoun and related formations (כַּאֲשֶׁר) often focus syntactically on the content of the promise. One might expect, then, a similar situation in Isa 19:18. Shifting the focus away from the idea that the lexeme שָׂפָה means "language" in this verse clears away the plethora of suggestions that point to the oddity without offering any clear way forward. Most agree that this verse is part of a later supplement to Isa 19.[61] Even later in time, such a meaning for שָׂפָה as "language" is less likely; indeed, Landman has convincingly shown that into the Mishnaic period such uses of the word are not attested in this meaning due to semantic narrowing.[62] The dual and plural of שָׂפָה, unlike לָשׁוֹן, are currently unattested as meaning "language." Moreover, no cognate terms of שָׂפָה in related Semitic dialects mean "language," as far as available data indicate, and this gloss is not attested for later dialects (excluding, naturally, Modern Hebrew, where שפה can mean "language"; see, however, Jastrow, who does not cite "language" as part of the entry for שׂפה in Mishnaic Hebrew). It would seem more difficult to maintain that earlier uses in the singular, when not conjoined with לשׁון, mean "language" than, given the discussion for Isa 19:18 (and previous analyses of Gen 11:1–9 and Zeph 3:9), that the term possibly never had this meaning at all in biblical Hebrew.[63]

On a surface reading, מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן would appear clearly to mean "to speak in the language of Canaan"; however, the pattern spotted above certainly makes this likelihood less plausible for Isa 19:18.[64] More specifically, the use of texts from

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[61] See note 1 above.

[62] Landman, "On Lips and Tongues in Ancient Hebrew," 66–77.

[63] Power, *Significance of Linguistic Diversity*, 34; Block, "Role of Language," 323. For arguments that Gen 11:1–9 and Zeph 3:9 do not refer to language, and for arguments that שָׂפָה, when not conjoined with לָשׁוֹן, does not mean "language," see Boyd, "Sargon's Dūr-Šarrukīn Cylinder Inscription," 87–111.

[64] Indeed, elsewhere in Isa 19 one finds evidence for how שָׂפָה appears in alternate phrasings, almost interchangeable not with לָשׁוֹן but with פֶּה. See, for example, the term עַל פִּי יְאוֹר for "by the bank of the Nile," in Isa 19:7. Another idiom with the same meaning employs שָׂפָה (Gen 41:3, 17; Exod 2:3; 7:15). Daniel 2:5 uses *lamed* instead of עַל, but with the same meaning. This recognition of how שָׂפָה and פֶּה function

the Pentateuch and Judges highlights a key methodological point of this article: the literary studies in the Pentateuchal texts particularly have highlighted key areas of the domain of meaning of the verbal pattern ד־ב־ר and שׁ־ב־ע. In this sense, the literary formulation of the "promise" in the covenant contexts of the verses from the Pentateuch and Judg 2:15 refines not only the meaning of ד־ב־ר in Isa 19:18, but the semantics of שָׂפָה as well.

Indeed, the pattern "to promise" for ד־ב־ר and "to swear" for שׁ־ב־ע, all attested in other passages in the Hebrew Bible that refer to the covenant relationship with the Israelite God, makes perfect sense in Isa 19:18. The prophet envisions a time when Egypt will also enter this relationship. The Pentateuchal passages and Judg 2:15 all have God as the subject (either addressed in the second or third person), though in Isa 19:18 the five cities in Egypt are the subject. That the other party could also be the subject of this pattern is no theoretical problem since in the non-P passages and in D, where the pattern appears in the Pentateuch, the covenant is itself bilateral, presupposing that Abraham and his descendants are also part of the agreement, "subject to testing" and acting as a "voluntary commitment" to behave in accordance with the divine will.[65] While it is by no means an exact parallel, passages like Num 30:3 (see also below for this chapter) and Ezra 10:5 describe human vows to God, employing שׁ־ב־ע and the nominal דָּבָר, the latter clearly meaning "vow/promise/commitment" contextually. Again, the similarity is not precise since ד־ב־ר in these cases is a noun and not the verbal pattern examined above, yet the semantics of the root in these contexts of human vows to God are broadly parallel. In other words, this change is no difficulty for the thesis here that the five cities are the subject if there is ample evidence from ancient Israel that would suggest that humans also willingly participate, and swear with their own terms, to this relationship. This is not to downplay the real difference between Isa 19:18 and the other passages

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interchangeably in some idioms in biblical Hebrew can also shed light on שָׂפָה אֶחָת in Gen 11:1 and 11:6 as synonymous with פֶּה אֶחָד, all meaning "with one accord." If this interchangeability is correct for multiple idioms in biblical Hebrew involving שָׂפָה and פֶּה, it would obviate one major criticism for Uehlinger's thesis that the idiom שָׂפָה אֶחָת does not refer to one language but rather something along the lines of "one speech." See Dennis Pardee for this critique of Uehlinger's thesis, in Pardee's review of *Weltreich und «eine Rede»: Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbaurzählung (Gen 11, 1–9)*, in *JNES* 53 (1994): 220–21.

[65] Note that Benjamin Sommer has argued that there is nonetheless a contrast in E, which envisions a more participatory notion of the concept of revelation in which Israel participates in unpacking what happened and was commanded at Horeb, and D, which is more directly dictated, a concept he terms "stenographic." In other words, E and D do not necessarily share every conception of how the divine and human do or do not relate to one another, even if both envision the covenant as bilateral. See B. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition*, AYBRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

The quote above refers to E's promise and J's promise, respectively, from Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs*, 22 and 116.

in the Hebrew Bible, given their distinct subjects, but rather to show that the difference is not an insurmountable obstacle to the thesis presented here.

A better translation of Isa 19:18, one that attends both to the rhetorical context of Isa 19 and the implications of the pattern and cognate evidence analyzed above is:

> on that day, there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that promise a vow (or, perhaps, affirm a commitment) with respect to Canaan, and swear allegiance to YHWH of hosts…[66]

Here the verb ד־ב־ר more precisely means "promise," as it does everywhere else that it appears in parallel syntax conjoined with the same subject for שׁ־ב־ע. This meaning further indicates that שָׂפָה likely should not be translated "language," as it would be odd for the cities to "promise the language of Canaan." One could argue that they are making a vow in the "language" of Canaan (as an adverbial complement), but, as all the previous proposals already raised, there is currently no evidence for a language of Canaan in biblical parlance (and the biblical authors can hardly have been aware of "Canaanite" as a modern term for linguistic dialectic geography; naturally, future evidence may change this assessment should data for such an ancient concept of subgrouping be discovered). Canaan refers to a land or a person from that land (with the *nisbe* ending). But it again raises more problems than it solves, and throws us back into the mire of uncertain and hypothetical possibilities, to suggest this meaning "language" for שָׂפָה.

Instead, two more likely approaches connect שָׂפָה in Isa 19:18 with other uses of the same lexeme elsewhere. One possibility is in Priestly texts involving a vow, as in Num 30:13 (כָּל־מוֹצָא שְׂפָתֶיהָ, "whatever comes from her lips," which is appositionally specified as a vow—לִנְדָרֶיהָ—or self-imposed obligation—לְאִסַּר נַפְשָׁהּ)[67] and particularly Lev 5:4. The latter is especially relevant as the only other passage with both שׁ־ב־ע and שָׂפָה in the same verse asides from Isa 19:18 (in Gen 41:3, the use of שָׂפָה is for the idiom "bank [of the Nile]"). The context is oath-making and how the lips, the content of what comes from them, is involved in such an action. To "swear…with the lips" (תִּשָּׁבַע...בִּשְׂפָתַיִם) in Lev 5:4 is parallel to Isa 19:18, where "speaking with the lip" and "swearing" (מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת... and נִשְׁבָּעוֹת respectively) are parallel actions communicating the same idea. This thesis also makes sense with the other attestations of the verbs examined above: the object of what is spoken is often the content of the promise.

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[66] For a nominal construct chain translated adverbially or with specification ("with respect to…"), see C. H. J. Van der Merwe, J. A. Naudé, and J. H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), §25.4.5–6.

[67] For the use of the *lamed* in appositional constructions, see Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §11.2.10.h.

It should be noted that these examples do not offer evidence that שָׂפָה on its own means "vow" or "commitment." Cognate evidence from Old South Arabian provides evidence of a denominative verb that means "to promise, command, grant."[68] The value of these other passages, however, is not so much for what the lexeme itself means (though see elsewhere in this article for arguments regarding what it does not mean). Instead, just as Isa 19:18 contains שָׂפָה in the *nomen rectum* syntactically and in a literary context with ד־ב־ר and שׁ־ב־ע, so also other passages with similar contexts and syntactic arrangements (whether in construct/pronominal state or used with שׁ־ב־ע) support the idea of "vow" as an appropriate translation for שָׂפָה in Isa 19:18.

The Egyptian cities are making vows to the land of Canaan, which was promised to Abraham and his descendants in biblical texts that also speak of the covenantal relationship with YHWH. In many of these texts, "Canaan" is used positively, as the possession and inheritance of Israel (so Gen 17:8, among many others).[69] This suggestion thus avoids many of the difficulties adduced above for שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן as "language of Canaan" and brings the sense closer to attested and similarly constructed Akkadian cognates. Hence, in the above translation, one option for ד־ב־ר is "promise" and שָׂפָה is "vow" as elsewhere in such contexts promises and oaths are the topic of concern (and as is consistent with the cognate evidence in Akkadian). The placement of an altar and pillar (מַצֵּבָה) to YHWH in Egypt enhances this image of connection to Israel's deity, underscoring Egyptian access to the divine.[70] Against this thesis, however, is the morphology of

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[68] W. W. Müller, "Altsüdarabische Beiträge zum hebräischen Lexikon," *ZAW* 75 (1963): 315.

[69] It is notable, though difficult to make too much of it, the link between Canaan and Egypt as brothers and sons of Ham in Gen 10:6. It is hard to see a trace whereby the rhetoric of the Priestly source in Gen 10:6 is related to Isa 19:18.

[70] According to Josephus, Onias thought of this passage as sanction to build his temple in Heliopolis/Leontopolis. This suggestion has manuscript basis in Isa 19:18. Instead of the reading in the MT עִיר הַהֶרֶס, the Targum Jonathan, Symmachus, and Vulgate have the variant חֶרֶס, which in Job 9:7 means "sun." Thus, the city could be "city of the sun," or Heliopolis in Greek. In this case, the town in Isa 19:18 would be the location where Onias built his temple in the second century BCE. For more, see T. Hibbard, "Isaiah 19:18: A Textual Variant in Light of the Temple of Onias in Egypt," in *Concerning the Nations: Essays on the Oracles against the Nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel*, ed. E. K. Holt, H. C. P. Kim, and A. Mein, LHB/OTS 612 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 32–52. See also A. Kooij, "The Old Greek of Isaiah 19:16–25: Translation and Interpretation," in *VI Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies: Jerusalem, 1986*, ed. C. E. Cox (Atlanta: Scholars Press., 1987), 127–44 (137).

Roberts sees 19:19 as an independent unit, not connected at all to 19:18 (*First Isaiah*, 263). Nonetheless one can find lines of connection between these verses. Indeed, the appearance of the altar in 19:19, along with the mention of the שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן in 19:18, achieves an interesting effect in the context of the larger oracle, even as 19:16–25 are later

שָׂפָה: it is dual in the Priestly texts (Lev 5:4), whereas it is singular and in construct with a definite/proper noun in Isa 19:18.

As a second option, the use of שָׂפָה in Gen 11:7 more closely matches this syntax. One might counter that Gen 11 is the Tower of Babel story, and שָׂפָה has traditionally been thought to mean "language" in this passage, which might seem to undermine the thesis of this article against translating שָׂפָה as "language" in Isa 19:18. Several recent publications have argued against language as part of the Tower of Babel, opting instead to see שָׂפָה as part of an idiom conveying unified intent and not describing the speech of a language *per se*.[71] The syntax in Gen 11:7 (לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שְׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ, "each individual did not hear/lis-

additions. See the note above about the later nature of vv. 16–25. Much of the oracle in 19:1–15 contains descriptions and details about Egypt that are specific to it (cities such as Tanis, the Nile and Egyptian canals, papyrus, etc.). Yet the universalistic vision of the altar then brings the Egyptian experience of accessing the divine close to the Israelite conception of God meeting the patriarchs at altars in the narratives of Genesis (see Schipper, "The City by the Sea," 33–34). One can add the legal vision in the Covenant Code of multiple altars allowing for access to the divine in any holy place, not unlike Isa 19:19–20. In other words, whatever details that are specific to Egypt as a contrast in Isa 19 then merge in the universalistic vision at the end toward Israelite conceptions of access to the divine. In the argument here, the use of the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן understood in the context of entering into a covenant with Israel and its God is consistent with this rhetoric regarding the altar and its ideological backgrounds. For the political notions of the stele, or מַצֵּבָה, to Israel's God in Egypt, see Balogh, *Stele of YHWH in Egypt*, 258–59.

[71] C. Uehlinger, *Weltreich und «eine Rede»: Eine neue Deutung der sogenannten Turmbauerzählung (Gen 11, 1–9)*, OBO 101 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); A. Berlejung, "Living in the Land of Shinar: Reflections on Exile in Genesis 11:1–9?" in *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Rise of Torah*, ed. P. Dubovsky, D. Markl, and J.-P. Sonnet, FAT 107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 89–111; Boyd, "Sargon's Dūr-Šarrukīn Cylinder Inscription," 87–111. Already in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE Campegius Vitringa and Luzzato argued that שָׂפָה אֶחָת is synonymous with בְּקוֹל אֶחָד, both as idioms of unified intent. For the implications of this view in Vitringa's philological work on Isa 19:18, as well as a helpful (though very dated) surveys of both linguistic perspectives (such as Gesenius's) and nonlinguistic readings of the passage (so Calvin and Vitringa), see J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953), 356; repr. of *The Earlier Prophecies of Isaiah and the Later Prophecies of Isaiah* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846–47); Kitto's volume has an entire history of the views of the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן from both English and German sources until the time of its publication (*A Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, 3rd ed. [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1866], 426). As Puvaneswaran indicates, Gesenius identifies in this phrase a general tone of confession; however, Gesenius, as in the sources cited above (and as indicated in his own lexicon), nonetheless viewed the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן as referring to the Hebrew language. See also Puvaneswaran for citations and bibliography pertaining to Vitringa and Gesenius (*Sprache in der Geschichte*, 24 n. 103; see also Gesenius's lexicon, which lists "language" and Isa 19:18 as a gloss for שָׂפָה, *Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* [London: Bagster, 1859], 793).

ten to/understand the intent of his neighbor") parallels Isa 19:18: שָׂפָה is in construct with a definite noun (a proper noun in Isa 19:18 and a determined noun—a nominal with a pronominal suffix—in Gen 11:7). In Gen 11:7, the issue is that unified intent is now confounded, and the alliances made are broken.[72] No one understands or perhaps honors prior intent or allegiances of their fellow as described in Gen 11:1. In Isa 19:18, the verb ד־ב־ר and noun שָׂפָה might speak to a mirror image, of joining or affirming allegiances, commitments, and alliances (as is the case with cognate, Akkadian phrasing), but with another region (כְּנַעַן).[73] The idea pertains to endorsing or swearing allegiance (in parallel to שׁ־ב־ע), or aligning oneself (as a promise) to the plan, perspective, and political authority of the land of Canaan.

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[72] The LXX provides an interesting window in which one can see the attempt of early interpretation of passages like Isa 19:18 and Gen 11:7 as reflecting the rhetoric of language. The overwhelming majority of cases of שָׂפָה in the Hebrew Bible are translated in Greek as χεῖλος, which means "lip" but not normally language, as the latter is typically γλῶσσα (J. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SCS 35 [Atlanta: SBL Press, 1993], 147). In Hebrew, the lexeme שָׂפָה takes the connotation "language" only when conjoined with לָשׁוֹן, but even here the LXX is consistent: שָׂפָה is typically rendered χεῖλος in these examples and לָשׁוֹן is rendered γλῶσσα. The only times when שׂפה is rendered γλῶσσα when it stands alone are in the context in which one might interpret the passage as about language, as in Gen 11 and Isa 19. Yet in Gen 11, the LXX retains χεῖλος for Gen 11:1, 6, and 9, but uses γλῶσσα in 11:7. It is as though the translator knew the typical translation for the Hebrew שָׂפָה, but also gives a nod to the interpretation of the story as "language"-based in Gen 11:7. In other words, passages such as Isa 19:18 and Gen 11:7 in the LXX show a peculiar translation attempt to incorporate language even as, noted by Wevers (see citation above), it is odd in the larger scheme of how the Greek and Hebrew correspond. For more on these passages and others, and how שָׂפָה operates both in the Hebrew and in translations, see Boyd "Sargon's Dūr-Šarrukīn Cylinder Inscription," 104–105. See James Covington, who argues that the Greek φωνὴ μία is a "contextual interpretation" of the Hebrew דְּבָרִים אֲחָדִים in Gen 11:1, in which a story about a single language at the outset might be better communicated through a singular noun form. Similarly, χεῖλος for שָׂפָה is a Hebraism according to Wevers because it is not the normal equivalent to "language" in Hebrew, and perhaps γλῶσσα appears in 11:7 as a similar phenomenon of a "contextual interpretation." See J.R. Covington, "The Poetics of Translation in Greek Genesis and the Virtuous Plot" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2019), 309–10. See Covington's Appendix II for the normal equivalence of שָׂפָה as χεῖλος ("The Poetics of Translation in Greek Genesis and the Virtuous Plot," 666). In other words, both the LXX of Gen 11:1–9 and Isa 19:18 might reflect the interpretation, but not necessarily original meaning, of both passages as about language. As such, the appearance of γλῶσσα in both passages is not necessarily evidence for this semantic domain for שָׂפָה.

[73] Naturally, official and solemn pronouncements relative to one's relationship to the divine, using שָׂפָה, appear often in the Psalms (see Pss 16:4; 40:10; etc.).

In this manner, both of these options provide additional evidence of support for Haag's and Lauber's understanding of the phrase, though arrived at through a distinct set of considerations.[74] For Haag and Lauber, the rhetorical context made clear that language in the sense of dialect was not the underlying referent to the phrase שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן. Indeed, both understand שָׂפָה here in Isa 19:18 not as a synonym of לָשׁוֹן for "language," but rather as content of speech and what is promised.[75] Neither, however, constructed their argument on the basis of the pattern noted above, which anchors their contextual observations along philological lines.[76]

In either case of the two options enumerated above, none of the larger rhetoric necessitates that language is in view (as Haag and Lauber already argued), and, despite the connection between language and land at various points in world history, a reanalysis of מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן as nonlinguistic addresses the difficulties inherent in the oddity of the phrase. Most significantly, it does justice to how the pattern ד־ב־ר and ש־ב־ע appears everywhere else. This is not to argue that these verbs are a hendiadys strictly speaking and function as such in every case, but they do communicate the same idea of allegiance to YHWH, or YHWH swearing allegiance to Israel. The use of two verbs allows for an almost poetic parallelism in how the relationship is expressed, but in all other cases of the Hebrew Bible the relationship is the core concern and not language. This conclusion, then, also provides another avenue for further defining what the lexeme שָׂפָה might mean in such passages. As a final implication, this understanding of Isa 19:18 as "promising a vow with respect to Ca-

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[74] See Schipper for a recent analysis that follows Haag's insights, opting to see in שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן a "confession of Canaan" and not "linguistically as representing a specific dialect" ("The City by the Sea," 33). More generally, in a sentence that aligns largely with the argument about the lexeme in this article, Schipper states "שׂפה 'lip' means 'form of speech' (Gen 11.1)" and that in Hebrew the "specific idiom" for "language" is "expressed by לשׁון not שׂפה" ("The City by the Sea," 33). Additional evidence (not cited in Schipper) is in Ezek 36:3 where the phrase שְׂפַת לָשׁוֹן points to the talk, gossip, or what comes out (so שָׂפָה) of a language (so לָשׁוֹן), the two not being synonymous. Likewise, Cook argues that both the five cities and term שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן are intentionally nondescript (citing Haag in the process; P. Cook, *A Sign and A Wonder: The Redactional Formation of Isaiah 18–20*, VTSup 147 [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 106–107).

[75] In this fashion, Haag drew attention also the Isa 45:23, תִּשָּׁבַע כָּל־ לָשׁוֹן, "every tongue will swear allegiance." The lexeme שָׂפָה is unlike לָשׁוֹן in that it most likely does not refer to a "language" in the sense of dialect, but both can denote content of speech, in both Isa 19:18 and 45:23 as pertaining to confession and swearing though by use of שָׂפָה in the former and לָשׁוֹן in the latter. See Schipper for similar conclusions ("The City by the Sea," 33). One could also point to constructions as in Jer 17:16, מוֹצָא שְׂפָתַי, "utterances/what comes out of my lips."

[76] Rather, Lauber focuses on the construction שׁבע plus ל, which elsewhere also indicates loyalty and homage directed toward God ("'JHWH wird sich Ägypten zu erkennen geben, und die Ägypter werden an jenem Tag JHWH erkennen'," 370).

naan" compliments the study of Shawn Zelig Aster on this chapter more broadly.[77] Aster draws parallels to a number of passages in Exodus, particularly Exod 3:9–12 and Exod 14, and Isa 19:20–22.[78] He argues that the Isaianic passages draw from these verses in Exodus specifically. This study does not support or deny these claims, nor does it require any specific directional relationship between the Pentateuchal passages above and Isa 19:18.

The translation offered here for Isa 19:18, even when this verse and perhaps 19:15–19 generally (given the repeated formation "on that day") are understood as later additions, is consistent with Aster's general reading of Isa 19:1–4 (and 1–15 more generally) and 19:20–25. Aster places these verses in the context of Assyrian rhetoric of royal sovereignty and the Assyrian attack against Egypt. The Assyrian attack is reimagined as originating from YHWH, and Isa 19:20–25, leveraging Assyrian royal inscriptions, demonstrate Egyptians as ascribing to the Judean god all sovereignty.[79] The understanding of Isa 19:18, even as a later supplement (which it most likely is; see the note and bibliography at the beginning of this article), fits this larger rhetoric of Egyptians recognizing the sovereignty of YHWH when the verbal pattern identified here is understood in this verse as an expression of oaths and vows toward the Judean deity. Both the clause governed by שׁ־ב־ע and ד־ב־ר work together as a larger phrase of Egyptian fealty to YHWH. This interpretation would then support the idea that the five cities in Isa 19:18 are not a historical reference to any Judean or Jewish exiles and would delegitimate any attempts to correlate this verse with Persian or Hellenistic era Jewish communities in Egypt, well attested and documented though they are. Rather, the five cities refer to Egyptians themselves being incorporated into a triadic relationship with YHWH (namely, Judah, Egyptians, and Assyrians all as people of YHWH). In this manner, the phrase מְדַבְּרוֹת שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן pertains to the "burden of Egypt" theme that Aster analyzes, in which Egyptians declare allegiance to the Judean deity, and the phrase does not concern Judean exiles and their language.

[77] Z. Aster, "Isaiah 19: The 'Burden of Egypt' and Neo-Assyrian Imperial Policy," *JAOS* 135 (2015): 453–70.

[78] Aster, "Isaiah 19," 462–65.

[79] Aster, "Isaiah 19," 461 (and throughout the article).