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WHAT DOES THE MOB WANT LOT TO DO IN GENESIS 19:9?

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Most English Bible translations render *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* in Gen 19:9 with some variant of “Stand back!” However, a very few interpreters recommend a translation along the lines of “Come closer!” more in keeping with the typical gloss on *נָגַשׁ*. A detailed study of the syntax and semantics of both *נָגַשׁ* and *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם*, as well as constructions similar to *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* demonstrates the strength of the minority suggestion.

Genesis 19:9 presents an interesting semantic conundrum. In this familiar scene, the men of Sodom have gathered outside of Lot’s house to demand that he bring out to them his two visitors. When Lot himself comes out instead and interposes himself between the rapacious mob and the closed door behind him, the narrator reports, “They said, *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם*! They said, ‘This one came to live as a stranger, and he keeps on playing the judge! Now we will do worse to you than to them.’ They pressed very hard against the man, against Lot, and they drew near to break down the door.” The curious phrase *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* rarely draws explicit comment from interpreters and translators, although it admits of two virtually opposite translations. Since *נָגַשׁ* has the sense “to approach, to draw near,” and respected lexicographers regard *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* as an adverb meaning something like “yonder,” most translators and commentators render *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* using some variation on “Stand back!”¹ A very few interpreters, however, have rendered *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* as something like “Come closer!”² The very fact that scholars have translated the phrase in precisely

¹ For *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* as “yonder,” see F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907); W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988); B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §172.b. For *שֹׁמְרֵי-הָאָחֳרָיִם* as “stand back,” see ASV, AV, CEV, HCSB, JPS, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV; R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 86; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 29; J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (2nd ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), p. 307 n. 9; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 1; New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 136; C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 295. Alter, Skinner, Speiser, and Westermann simply render the phrase without comment. Hamilton merely claims that *הִלָּאָה* “permits the translation ‘stand back!’” without further comment on the function of *הִלָּאָה*. Hamilton does cite Gershon Brin, “The Formulae ‘from ... and Onward/Upward’ (*מִן ... וְהַלָּאָה/וְיָמַעְלָה*)” *JBL* 99 (1980): 161–171; Brin’s article is helpful, but limited, as discussed in the present study.

² So D. M. Gunn, “Narrative Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (2nd ed.; ed. S. L. McKenzie and S. R. Haynes; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), p. 216 and L. Bechtel in two different studies, “A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19.1–11,” in *Genesis*

opposite ways attracts sufficient interest to invite a more careful examination of this intriguing phrase.

1. THE SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX OF נָגַשׁ

Because the verb נָגַשׁ generally has the sense “to draw near, to approach,” some readers might consider it unusual to find a speaker using the verb to mean “move away.” Thus one line of argument in favor of translating הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה as “come here” concerns the semantics of the verb itself. In two separate studies, Lyn Bechtel has argued for translating הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה along these lines, but her two treatments differ somewhat from one another.

In a 1998 essay, Bechtel translated הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה as “Draw near!” In doing so, she appealed to the use of נָגַשׁ in the judicial context of Deut 25:1. Bechtel contends that the mob’s use of the verb שָׁפַט invites readers to hear judicial overtones in the mob’s speech. In making this argument, however, Bechtel seems to have construed הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה as a statement made by the men of Sodom to *each other*; according to her, “The townsmen are to ‘draw near’ in judgment of Lot.” However, the grammar speaks against this idea. In saying “הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה,” the mob uses a masculine singular imperative, but in Gen 19:9 the mob speaks with one voice as “we,” using the first person plural form נַרְעֵה (“we will do harm”), and the narrator describes the mob’s speech using plural verb forms (as וַיֹּאמְרוּ ‘they said’). It seems unlikely that in the midst of all these plurals, the mob would address itself (or the men of the mob each other) using a singular imperative rather than, say, a plural cohortative. הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה surely stands as a command that the crowd barks at Lot, not at itself.

Bechtel takes a different tack in a 1999 essay. Again invoking the mob’s use of שָׁפַט to view the scene judicially, and again cross-referencing Deut 25:1 and Isa 50:8, Bechtel this time translates הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה as “Present yourself.” The crowd thus demands that Lot present himself for judgment, as at the conclusion of a court case. Although Bechtel’s attempts to interpret this scene with a jurisprudential spin carry some *prima facie* plausibility, her interpretation really stands or falls with the adequacy of its treatment of נָגַשׁ.

(A Feminist Companion to the Bible, Second Series; ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 124–125 and L. Bechtel, “Boundary Issues in Genesis 19.1–38,” in *Escaping Eden: New Feminist Perspectives on the Bible* (ed. H. C. Washington, S. L. Graham, and P. Thimmes; New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 33. The sense “come here” was also proposed by E. König in his *Die Genesis* (Gutersloh, 1925), according to R. I. Lettelier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 151 n. 271.

The intriguing verb נגש appears 125 times in the Tanak, making it well-attested though not exceptionally common. In some verses, writers use both Qal and Niphal forms of נגש to refer to the same event, demonstrating clearly that no significant semantic difference obtains for נגש between these two *binyanim*. For example, Gen 33:7 reads, “Leah also drew near [נתגש, Qal] with her children, and they bowed down, and afterward Joseph drew near [נגש, Niphal] with Rachel, and they bowed down.”³ The verb implies movement, “drawing near” toward some destination, but writers may indicate such destinations in various ways. When they specify the destination, biblical writers usually use the preposition אל to mark it, but they can also use a variety of other prepositions, such as ל, ב, א, ע, and לפני.⁴ In a handful of cases, the adverb הנה or the adverb הלה, both meaning “here,” appear alongside נגש. In about ten cases, the destination goes unspecified, but the purpose of the “drawing near,” usually indicated using ל (or, once, אל), imply the direction of motion. Over forty appearances of the verb נגש lack any preposition or adverb marking the direction or purpose. In many of these instances, the clause that follows נגש opens with a *wayyiqtol* form potentially indicating purpose. Table 1 summarizes these data.

This information funds an assessment of Bechtel’s treatment of נגש in Gen 19:9. Bechtel bases her jurisprudential interpretation of the scene almost entirely on the appearance of שפט later in the verse. If one defines a “judicial context” quite loosely as one in which “judicial language,” broadly construed, appears, then נגש arguably appears in nine (other) “judicial contexts.”⁵ Bechtel’s parade examples, Deut 25:1 and Isa 50:8, do not provide close conceptual or syntactical parallels to Gen 19:9. In Deut 25:1, two disputing parties “draw near for judgment” (וַיִּגְשׁוּ אֶל-הַמִּשְׁפָּט), appearing before

³ See also Exod 24:2, “Moses drew near [וַיִּגְשׁ, Niphal] to יהוה alone, but [the people] did not draw near [וַיִּגְשׁוּ, Qal],” and Jer 30:21, “I will bring him near and he will approach [וַיִּגְשׁ, Niphal] me, for otherwise, who would dare to approach [וַיִּגְשׁוּ, Qal] me, declares יהוה.” These comments presuppose the accuracy of the masoretic vocalization of נגש in the seventeen instances where it appears to stand in the Niphal form. In every instance, the Niphal forms attested in the MT—third person masculine singular perfect (8), third person feminine singular perfect (1), third person common plural perfect (5), second person masculine plural perfect (2); and masculine plural participle (1)—would be indistinguishable from the corresponding Qal forms in an unpointed text. Using the masoretic vocalizations, נגש is never attested in the Qal perfect or the Niphal imperfect. According to P. A. Siebesma, *The Function of the Niph'al in Biblical Hebrew* (Assen and Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1991), p. 90, this use of Niphal in the perfect and Qal in the imperfect is a pattern with this verb and others (פּוֹרֵץ and קוֹטֵף, to name but two). In this, Siebesma follows M. Lambert, “L’emploi du Nifal en Hébreu,” *REJ* 41 (1900); unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of Lambert’s article while preparing this study.

⁴ In all three cases where א marks the destination (Num 4:19; 1 Sam 9:18; 30:21), and in one case where ע appears (Ezek 44:13), some manuscript evidence suggests that copyists may have written these letters accidentally, distorting an original אל. Such evidence does not exist for the other case using ע (Ezek 9:6).

⁵ Gen 18:23; Exod 24:14; Deut 25:1, 9; Isa 41:1, 21; 45:21; 50:8; Amos 6:3.

a third party who renders a judicial decision. Nothing of this kind happens in Gen 19:9, nor does the mob tell Lot to *גַּשׁ אֶל-הַמְשַׁפָּט*. In Isa 50:8, the speaker invites any would-be-accusers to “approach me” (*וַיִּגַּשׁ אֵלַי*) in the manner of a plaintiff accusing a defendant. Here too only the weakest of analogies obtains with Gen 19:9; the mob does not tell Lot to *גַּשׁ אֵלַינִי*, as though inviting Lot to sue them. None of the other occurrences of *גַּשׁ* in “judicial contexts” resemble Gen 19:9 any better than these conceptually, much less syntactically. Indeed, the fact that the mob self-professedly intends to “do harm” (*נַרְע לְךָ*) suggests that “justice” lies far from their top priority.

Most importantly, however, Bechtel simply ignores the adverb *הִקְלָאָה*. If one accepts Bechtel’s claim that Gen 19:9 constitutes a “judicial context” that influences the sense of *גַּשׁ* therein, one must still take the adverb into account. In the nine other arguably judicial contexts where *גַּשׁ* appears, it either stands alongside *אֵל* plus a term naming or evoking a recognized judiciary (twice: Exod 24:14; Deut 25:1), stands alongside *אֵל* joined to a noun or pronoun naming the defendant (twice: Deut 25:9; Isa 50:8), or stands alone, without any preposition or adverb providing additional specification (the remaining five cases). Syntactically, none of these instances strongly resemble *גַּשׁ-הִקְלָאָה* in Gen 19:9. One must therefore judge Bechtel’s rendering of “present yourself”—based on the nuances of *גַּשׁ* in judicial contexts—as insufficiently warranted.

2. THE SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX OF *הִקְלָאָה*

David Gunn’s translation of *גַּשׁ-הִקְלָאָה* depends not on the nuances of *גַּשׁ*, but on the semantic function of *הִקְלָאָה*. Gunn himself does not go into much detail, but posits that “the Hebrew means not ‘draw back out of the way’ as most translations have it but ‘get close and them some more!’”⁶

Although Gunn does not document or otherwise attempt to justify his claim about the sense of *גַּשׁ-הִקְלָאָה*, his claim finds some measure of support in Gershon Brin’s study of the formulae *מִן ... וְהִלָּאָה* and *מִן ... וּמַעֲלָה*. Brin suggests that both the “positional” and “temporal” uses of these phrases “convey the idea of an unlimited continuation of the thing described.”⁷ Brin’s study deals mainly with the term *מַעֲלָה* in phrases describing someone’s age, particularly in census texts, and he does not treat *הִלָּאָה* constructions in detail. Brin himself cites *גַּשׁ-הִקְלָאָה* in Gen 19:9 as an example of a

⁶ D. M. Gunn, “Narrative Criticism,” p. 216.

⁷ G. Brin, “The Formulae,” p. 161.

typical positional use of *הִלָּאָה*, translating the entire phrase as “stand back.”⁸ Yet Brin’s translation of *גַּשְׁ-הִלָּאָה* arguably fails to follow through on his conclusion that *הִלָּאָה* formulae “convey the idea of an unlimited continuation of the thing described,” since the unlimited continuation of *גַּשְׁ* would seem (at first glance, at least) to involve drawing ever nearer, not moving farther away. This reasoning seems to elucidate the substance of Gunn’s implicit argument.

Further examination of the actual uses of *הִלָּאָה*, uncommon as they are, seems to confirm Brin’s general characterization of the adverb’s semantic value and, in so doing, lends support to Gunn’s understanding of *גַּשְׁ-הִלָּאָה*. In eleven of its sixteen occurrences in the Tanak, *הִלָּאָה* appears in the construction [NP]-*מִן-הִלָּאָה*, where “NP” stands for a noun or noun phrase (the *מִן* usually stands prefixed to the noun rather than joined by *maqqeph*, but this makes no semantic difference). Five of those eleven instances involve temporal references, such as “from the eighth day *וְהִלָּאָה*” (Lev 22:27). Most English translations render *הִלָּאָה* as “on,” “onward,” “forward,” or “thereafter” in these verses, acknowledging the basic dynamic that Brin says *הִלָּאָה* denotes: continued movement in a specified direction. In its temporal usage, the directional aspect of *הִלָּאָה* conforms to the linear flow of time. The phrases cited here never imply a backward recollection of past time, but always refer to a forward temporal trajectory.

Six verses in the Tanak exhibit a geographical use of *הִלָּאָה* in the construction [P]-*מִן-הִלָּאָה*, where “P” stands for a place name or geographically specific phrase. When such phrases concern personal motion, *הִלָּאָה* rather clearly denotes moving along a trajectory already underway (1 Sam 10:3). In Num 32:19 and 1 Sam 20:22, 37—where this construction stands in direct discourse—speakers use this construction to verbally locate objects or places that lie beyond the addressee or point of reference along a trajectory away from the speaker, such that the addressee must follow that trajectory away from the speaker to locate the objects or reach the location envisioned. Curiously, the three instances where *מִן* is attached to *הִלָּאָה* itself attest a similar sense. If one glosses *הִלָּאָה* as “yonder,” as the standard lexicons suggest, then one might suspect that the construction [P]-*לְ-הִלָּאָה* would mean something like “from over there toward P,” but in fact the *opposite* case obtains. Amos 5:27 amply illustrates this point: *וְהִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִהִלָּאָה לְדַמְשֶׁק׃* clearly does not mean that Amos thinks his Israelite audience will start out somewhere on the far side of Damascus (with respect to Bethel) and move

⁸ G. Brin, “The Formulae,” p. 161.

toward Damascus, but rather that his audience will begin from its own land and move in the direction of Damascus and then continue beyond that point. Thus, even the construction [P]ֶלֶּמֶּהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ denotes movement in a trajectory away from the place designated. The very interesting fact that phrases constructed as [P]ֶלֶּמֶּהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ have virtually the same semantic value as those constructed as [P]ֶלֶּמֶּהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ מִן suggests that the מִן affixed to הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ functions partitively, and the לֶּ affixed to the toponym functions ablatively, such that one could justly render וְהִגַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לְדַמְשֶׁק מִהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ as “I will exile you to one of the places that is reached by going onward from Damascus.” A wooden substitution of “yonder” for הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ does not fit these circumstances, and this casts doubt on whether readers should regard הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ as having any *absolute* spatial sense at all.

Isaiah 18:2, 7 present a more complicated picture. Both verses describe a people as being מִן־הוּא וְהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ. English translations render וְהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ מִן־הוּא variously as “near and far” (NRSV), “far and away” (NJPS), “far and wide” (NIV), and so on. All of these renderings imply that הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ functions chiefly to denote distance. Structurally, though, מִן־הוּא וְהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ perfectly matches the other four occurrences of מִן־[P]ֶלֶּמֶּהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ, and its content differs only in the use of הוּא instead of a place name or a noun phrase denoting a place. In the other such instances, however, הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ seems to denote continued motion rather than a specific position. One may thus plausibly suggest that מִן־הוּא וְהֶלֶּאֱחָהּ bears the sense “from this [place] and onward” (or “outward”), in whatever direction and however far one might be going.

In sum, the majority of the Tanak’s uses of הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ commend the view that the word normally functions adverbially to extend a temporal or geographical trajectory along a particular path to some indeterminate extent. Thus far, Gunn’s glossing of שֶׁ־הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ in Gen 19:9 as “get close and then some more” apparently stands on solid semantic ground with respect to the sense of הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ.

3. PARALLEL CONSTRUCTIONS

Though Biblical Hebrew exhibits stable semantics and syntax, individual writers do employ creative variations (never mind simple grammatical mistakes). Therefore, one might do well to examine the closest verbal parallels to שֶׁ־הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ before reaching a conclusion about the phrase’s sense in Gen 19:9. With regard to the use of the adverb הֶלֶּאֱחָהּ, Num 17:2 (16:37 in most

English versions) offers the closest parallel phrase, זָרָה־הֶלְאָה.⁹ Among all sixteen biblical uses of הֶלְאָה, only the phrases in Gen 19:9 and Num 17:2 lack the usual syntactical framework of prepositions and conjunctions that clarifies the adverbial function of הֶלְאָה. English translations of Num 17:2 variously render the הֶלְאָה in זָרָה־הֶלְאָה וְאֶת־הָאֵשׁ as “far and wide” (NRSV), “abroad” (JPS, NASB), “some distance away” (NAB, NET, NIV), “far away” (HCSB; cf. NJB), and so on, apparently taking הֶלְאָה as “yonder,” as in the usual translation of Gen 19:9. However, these translations seem to absolutize the *spatial result* of the more frequent הֶלְאָה constructions rather than indicating the *semantic function* of הֶלְאָה as appropriate to this particular passage. An outward trajectory already seems to inhere in the verb זָרָה ‘to scatter’ (an antonym of קָבַץ ‘to gather’ as in Jer 31:10). In Num 17:2, then, the verb זָרָה indicates that the ashes will initially move away from the censers, and the adverb הֶלְאָה indicates that the ashes will continue to follow that path until they come to rest.

With regard to the verb נָגַשׁ, the closest parallels stand in the three examples of direct discourse where an imperative form of נָגַשׁ, followed by an adverb, appears. In all three cases, an adverb meaning “here” follows an imperative form of נָגַשׁ (specifically, הֵלֵם in Ruth 2:14 and 1 Sam 14:38, and הִנֵּה in Josh 3:9). While these instances cannot, of course, demonstrate that נָגַשׁ־הֶלְאָה in Gen 19:9 means anything like “get close and then some more,” neither do they give any support to the idea that characters speaking in biblical narrative might use an imperatival form of נָגַשׁ to tell someone to move farther away from the speaker. Readers must resist the temptation to assume that הֶלְאָה functions more or less as an antonym of הֵלֵם and הִנֵּה, for (as discussed above) such an inference would not really fit the attested sense of הֶלְאָה.

4. CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

The typical biblical uses of both נָגַשׁ and הֶלְאָה support the minority translation of נָגַשׁ־הֶלְאָה as “come here” a bit better than the traditional translation, “stand back.” Before drawing a conclusion from this data, however, readers would do well to examine the phrase in its immediate context to see whether that context demands one translation or the other.

⁹ The *BHS* apparatus offers זָרָה־הֶלְאָה as a speculative emendation, with no manuscript support; K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

By the moment when the mob tells Lot to “נִשְׁתָּחֵלֵץ” the narrator has drawn for readers a picture of Lot standing outside of his house, facing the crowd, with the door closed behind him. The verb נִשְׁ frames the verse. At the beginning of the verse, the mob tells Lot to “נִשְׁתָּחֵלֵץ”; at the end of the verse, the narrator informs readers that the men of Sodom “drew near to break down the door” (וַיִּנְשְׂבוּ לְשַׁבֵּר הַדָּלֶת). Syntactically, the use of נִשְׁ in Gen 19:9b fits the reasonably well-attested pattern in which נִשְׁ is followed by the preposition לְ attached to a noun or infinitive verb that reveals the purpose of the motion denoted by נִשְׁ, and in so doing implicitly supplies also the direction of that motion. In this case, Gen 19:9b indicates that the crowd wants to break down or breach the door of Lot’s house. If Lot himself stands between the crowd and the door, then translating נִשְׁתָּחֵלֵץ as “stand back” makes good contextual sense: the mob wants him out of the way so that it might more easily invade his home.

Yet the other element of purpose in Gen 19:9b complicates this apparently straightforward reading, as the mob announces its intention to “do more harm to you [Lot] than to them [the visitors].” If the mob intends to harm Lot in some way, then it seems counterproductive to tell him to “stand back” out of the way. In this case, “come closer and then some more” would seem to fit the context better: the mob wants Lot to get closer so they can inflict physical harm upon him.

The immediate narrative context, therefore, seems to point in *both* directions. “Stand back” makes better sense if one emphasizes the crowd’s *narrated action* at the end of the verse, while “come closer” makes better sense if one emphasizes the crowd’s *stated intention* immediately following their command of “נִשְׁתָּחֵלֵץ.” One could perhaps try to reconcile this tension by explaining that “we will do more harm to you than to them” does not contemplate harm against Lot’s *person*, but rather against his household. But this explanation strains against the narrative facts. The mob appears to have intended physical harm to Lot’s houseguests, so readers most naturally assume that they now state their intention to treat Lot himself more savagely. Moreover, the crowd’s anger flares in response to Lot’s offer of his daughters in place of his houseguests, though the daughters would provide exactly the opportunity to inflict harm on Lot’s household instead of on Lot himself. No easy way to escape this contextual dilemma presents itself. The mob states one intention—to harm Lot—and acts on a different purpose—to break down the door. Depending on which of these actions one emphasizes, each of the two proposed senses of נִשְׁתָּחֵלֵץ in its turn better fits the passage in which the enigmatic command stands.

5. CONCLUSIONS

How, then, ought *נִגַּשׁ-הֵלָאָה* be translated in Gen 19:9? The attested patterns in the syntax of *נִגַּשׁ* suggest that the direction of the motion implied in *נִגַּשׁ* is usually specified by a phrase explicitly stating the destination or purpose of the act of “approaching.” The closest parallels to the mob’s *נִגַּשׁ-הֵלָאָה* are *נִגַּשׁ הַהֵנָּה* and *נִגַּשׁ הַלָּמָּה*, but these parallels simply push attention back to the function of *הֵלָאָה*. The translation “yonder” offered in the lexicons seems to “freeze” the typical spatial result of moving *הֵלָאָה*, as if the adverb connoted a static position some distance away rather than continued movement along a trajectory defined by collocated words and phrases.

In sum, while Bechtel’s proposal of a judicial sense for *נִגַּשׁ* in Gen 19:9 flounders on her inattention to the adverb *הֵלָאָה*, Gunn’s proposal to read *נִגַּשׁ-הֵלָאָה* as “come closer and then some more” does seem to line up rather well with both the usual sense of *נִגַּשׁ* and the usual adverbial function of *הֵלָאָה*. Although the case is not airtight, those few interpreters who regard *נִגַּשׁ-הֵלָאָה* in Gen 19:9 not as “Stand back!” but rather as “Come here!” do stand on solid syntactical and semantic ground.

Table 1. Syntax of *נִגַּשׁ*

	Qal	Niphal	Hiphil	Hophal	Hitpael
Destination marked by <i>הֵלָאָה</i>	29 times—Gen 27:22; 43:19; 44:17; 45:4aα ; Exod 19:15; [24:2aβ]; 24:14; 28:43; 30:20; 34:30; Lev 21:23; Num 8:19; 32:16; Josh 14:6; 21:1; 1 Sam 17:40; 1 Kgs 18:21, 30 (twice); 20:22; 2 Kgs 2:5; 5:13; Isa 50:8; Jer 30:21a; Ezek 44:13 (twice); Ps 91:7; Ezra 4:2; 9:1	7 times—Exod 19:22; 20:21; 24:2aα; 2 Sam 11:20, 21; 1 Kgs 20:13; Jer 30:21b	12 times—Gen 48:10, 13; Exod 21:6 (twice); Lev 2:8; 1 Sam 13:9; 14:34a; 15:32; 1 Sam 30:7b; 2 Sam 13:11; 2 Kgs 4:5, 6		
Destination marked by <i>הָאָה</i>	3 times—Num 4:19*; 1 Sam 9:18*; 30:21*				
Destination marked by <i>כִּי</i>	2 times—Isa 65:5; Job 41:8	1 time—Amos 9:13			

Destination marked by לְ	1 time—[Isa 49:20]		6 times—Gen 27:25; 1 Sam 30:7a; 2 Sam 17:29; Amos 5:25; Mal 1:7; 2:12	2 times—2 Sam 3:34; Mal 1:11	
Destination marked by לְפָנָי			2 times—1 Sam 28:25; 2 Chron 29:23		
Destination marked by עַד	2 times—Gen 33:3; Judg 9:52				
Destination marked by עַל	2 times—Ezek 9:6; 44:13*				
Destination is הִלְאָה	1 time—Gen 19:9a				
Destination is הִלְלָה	1 time—Ruth 2:14		1 time—1 Sam 14:38		
Destination is הִנֵּה	1 time—Josh 3:9				
Purpose marked by לְ		1 time—Deut 25:1			
Purpose marked by לְ	6 times—Gen 19:9b; Lev 21:21; Judg 20:23; 2 Sam 10:13 // 1 Chron 19:14; Jer 46:3	1 time—1 Sam 7:10	3 times—2 Sam 17:29; 2 Kgs 4:27; Mal 1:8		
No preposition or adverb used	22 times—Gen 18:23; 27:21, 26, 27 ; 29:10; 33:6, 7; 45:4b; [Exod 24:2aβ]; Exod 34:32; Josh 8:11; 1 Sam 17:16; 2 Sam 1:15 ; 1 Kgs 5:1; 18:36; 20:28; 22:24 // 2 Chron 18:23; Isa 41:1; Jer 42:1; Joel 4:9; 2 Chron 29:31	5 times—Gen 33:7; Exod 34:32; Deut 20:2; 21:25; Isa 29:13	13 times—Gen 27:25; Exod 32:6; Judg 6:19; 1 Sam 14:18, 34b; 23:9; Isa 41:21, 22; 45:21; Amos 6:3; 9:10; Mal 3:3; Job 40:19		1 time—Isa 45:20
* Manuscript evidence exists for reading לְ in each case so marked.					
Bold indicates an imperative form of נָטָה.					

Table 2. Typical Constructions with הִלָּצָה

Construction	Occurrences	Sense
מֵן + temporal reference + הִלָּצָה	5 times—Lev 22:27; Num 15:23; 1 Sam 18:9; Ezek 39:22; 43:27	Trajectory beginning with the temporal reference point
מֵן + toponym + הִלָּצָה	6 times—Num 32:19; 1 Sam 10:3; 20:22, 37; Isa 18:2, 7	Trajectory away from the toponym
מֵן הִלָּצָה + toponym	3 times—Gen 35:21; Jer 22:19; Amos 5:27	Trajectory away from the toponym