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# COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SCRIPTURE INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE

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In fulfilment of Kevin Vanhoozer's assumption 'that every form of literary theory and criticism eventually comes to roost in biblical interpretation'<sup>1</sup> Cognitive Linguistic analysis has entered Biblical Studies and there is no going back. Most people will be unfamiliar with Cognitive Linguistics. In this paper I aim to answer the question: Can Cognitive Linguistics be used in the service of the church, or is it a hindrance that should be rejected? What concord is there between Cognitive Linguistics and biblical interpretation?

In order to answer this question I will first outline what Cognitive Linguistics is. I will then outline Ellen van Wolde's cognitive linguistic interpretation of Sodom and Gomorrah. I will finish with a critique of this interpretation drawing on Cognitive Linguistics and the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture.

## COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS: AN IMPRESSIONIST'S SKETCH

In Cognitive Linguistics, language use is considered in the context of cognition.<sup>2</sup> This places meaning firmly in the mind. Langacker, one of the 'fathers' of Cognitive Linguistics writes

Our concern is with the meanings of linguistic expressions. Where are these meanings to be found? From a cognitive linguistic perspective, the answer is evident: meanings are in the minds of the speakers who produce and understand the expressions. It is hard to imagine where else they might be.<sup>3</sup>

With this focus on meaning being found in the mind, hard distinctions between linguistic and world knowledge become irrelevant. It is not hard to find an example of this in Scripture. In Isaiah 10:26a (ESV) we read

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 'Translating Holiness: Forms of Word, Writ and Righteousness', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 13.4 (2011), 381–402 (p. 384).

<sup>2</sup> Dirk Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald W. Langacker, *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 27.

‘And the LORD of hosts will wield against them a whip, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb.’ World knowledge is required here to understand what is being conveyed. Unless we know the events recorded in Judges 7 (the shared knowledge about Midian at Oreb), while the words themselves are comprehensible, the words lose their force.

This is a system ‘in which language use is the methodological basis of linguistics.’<sup>4</sup> It is important to understand that although the cognitive perspective locates meaning in cognition, this does not eliminate the importance of the speech community.

For purposes of studying language as part of cognition, an expression’s meaning is first and foremost its meaning for a single (representative) speaker [...]. An individual’s notion of what an expression means develops through communicative interaction and includes an assessment of its degree of conventionality in the speech community.<sup>5</sup>

In order to communicate, we talk in words, phrases, sentences, genres, and languages which are understood in a certain way within a speech community. The words we use necessarily mean more than we say. At the level of the word we can see this in action through the uses of ‘Ephraim’ in the Bible. ‘Ephraim’ is both the word for one of the sons of Joseph and also refers to the clan of Israel. However, it is also used as a meronym to refer to the whole of the Northern kingdom (e.g. Isa. 7). The meaning of the writer will not be understood correctly unless we share the community’s understanding. In the case of Isaiah 7 the meaning can be retrieved from the discourse.

Similarly, at the genre level of discourse we can only understand the meaning of a prophecy if we share the correct context. Prophecies in the Bible need to be understood in terms of Jeremiah 18. God does not need to declare an ‘if-clause’ in prophecies. It is implied that if humans change their ways that the prophecy may not necessarily come about.<sup>6</sup> This is demonstrated clearly in 2 Kings 20:1–11 (cf. Isa. 38:1–22) where Isaiah prophesies simply that Hezekiah will die from an illness. Hezekiah pleads with God and the prophecy is reversed. Similarly it is demonstrated in Jonah 3 where Jonah prophesies simply that in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown. The people repent of their evil and God reverses the prophecy of destruction (3:10). If, as a modern reader we approach this genre of

<sup>4</sup> Geeraerts, p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> Langacker, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> Note that there are clearly some prophecies that are not contingent on human behaviour such as in Ezekiel 36:22–32 and Jeremiah 31:31–34 in which God says he will act despite the disobedience of his people.

prophecy expecting it not to be contingent on human action we will be baffled when God seems to change his mind on something he had ‘firmly’ declared (e.g. 1 Sam. 2:30–36). It is shared world knowledge that helps the reader to correctly interpret these prophecies.<sup>7</sup>

## COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS IN BIBLICAL STUDIES

Ellen van Wolde, has written extensively on the application of Cognitive Linguistics to Biblical Interpretation. In her 2009 book *Reframing Biblical Studies* she writes:

I intend to prove that it is possible for biblical scholarship to study meaning as “emergent reality,” which on the one hand arises from linguistic, logical, and literary structures, from experience and perception-based cognitions, and from cultural- and context-bound routines; and on the other hand constitutes a new reality of its own.<sup>8</sup>

She proposes a method of analysis which incorporates findings from both linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts to the interpretation of the text.<sup>9</sup> So far so good. An example of the incorporation of extra-linguistic information can be found in her use of archaeological information to illuminate the text of Job 28. In the ESV, Job 28:9a reads ‘Man puts his hand to the flinty rock’; however, the word *hallamish* (flinty rock) is more likely to refer to a flint tool ‘the many flint tools found in the mining areas demonstrate that reference is made to the equipment, the flint tool in the worker’s hand.’<sup>10</sup> This leads van Wolde to the translation ‘he stretches out his hand with flint tools.’<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Although Vanhoozer (originally published 1988) is not dealing directly with Cognitive Linguistics, his comments on genre are essentially compatible with this view I am describing here. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), pp. 335–50.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen J. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies: When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), pp. 20–21.

<sup>9</sup> For her rather technical summary of ‘The Cognitive Method of Analysis’ see van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies*, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen J. van Wolde, ‘Wisdom, Who Can Find It?: A Non-Cognitive and Cognitive Study of Job 28:1–11’, in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. by Ellen J. van Wolde, Biblical Interpretation Series, 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 1–36 (pp. 19–20).

<sup>11</sup> van Wolde, ‘Wisdom, Who Can Find It?’, p. 20.

This is relatively straightforward and makes sense. Who would argue that the application of Cognitive Linguistics impedes clarity? It instead appears to make things clearer. However, this is not the conclusion of the matter. Indeed, that is simply a small portion of van Wolde's argument concerning Job 28. I will illustrate some additional possibilities for application through her analysis of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

#### VAN WOLDE ON SODOM AND GOMORRAH

A few scholars have commented on the judicial language present in the Sodom and Gomorrah episode (Gen. 18–19).<sup>12</sup> This marks the base on which van Wolde builds in her study.<sup>13</sup> Her interpretation hinges on the language of the episode being interpreted as judicial. She examines the various judicial words and phrases in the episode. First, after looking at all the uses of the two nouns and verbs for *outcry*, she argues that the translation of Genesis 18:20 'outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah' inadequately translates the Hebrew phrase. Instead she argues that it means 'the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah'. This implies that the outcry is 'not directed against the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah,' rather it is 'uttered by them'.<sup>14</sup> She argues that 'It is mainly the literary context and the interpretation of that context that brought biblical scholars to the conclusion that Gen 18:20–21 and 19:13 express "the outcry *against* Sodom and Gomorrah."' <sup>15</sup> In response to this outcry God begins a legal inquest.

The next feature of the text van Wolde analyses is the word *ša'ar* (gate) from Genesis 19:1. This is the 'site of judgement or decision-making' for the community implying that Lot's presence in the city gate is 'not gratuitous or incidental to the narrative of Genesis 19'.<sup>16</sup> Based on the description of Lot as a 'resident alien' or sojourner (Gen. 19:9 — 'This fellow came to sojourn...'), his presence in the gate acting as though 'he were in charge, [...] admitting men who came to the city by night' and then inviting the men to his house 'would have been offensive to the men of

<sup>12</sup> For example Scott Morschauser, "Hospitality", *Hostiles and Hostages: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19.1–9*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 27.4 (2003), 461–85.

<sup>13</sup> Ellen J. van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', in *Cognitive Linguistic Explorations in Biblical Studies*, ed. by Bonnie Howe and Joel B. Green (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 172–203 (pp. 177–82).

<sup>14</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 192.

<sup>15</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 192.

<sup>16</sup> Morschauser, p. 464; van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 194.

Sodom.<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly then, the men accuse Lot of acting as judge over them despite being a sojourner.

In the Genesis 18–19 narrative, God is set up as the judge. The verb *yada'* (to know) occurs throughout the story beginning at the start of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative. In Genesis 18:19 the ESV translates it as *chosen* in 'For I have *chosen* him [Abraham]...'. It occurs again in Genesis 18:20–21 together with the verb 'to see' which together form part of the judicial vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> God is presented explicitly as the judge towards the end of the discourse with Abraham (Gen. 18:25).

Moving in to Genesis 19, we see the verb 'to know' next used by the people of Sodom. Van Wolde writes 'They use legal terminology: "bring," "before us," and "so that we may know them."' <sup>19</sup> In this context, she argues, the verb means to know 'so as to make a decision'.<sup>20</sup> The reaction of Lot is to take the role of negotiator. His offer of his daughters may be one of hostage exchange (as opposed to an offer of a sexual object).<sup>21</sup> In response the men get angry and command Lot to 'Draw near' (translated 'Stand back!' in the ESV) which is also a legal term — meaning to draw near for questioning — following which they 'draw near' to the door (Gen. 19:9).<sup>22</sup> This action ultimately leads to the blinding of the men such that they are unable to act as judges.

Van Wolde in placing this story within the wider context argues that 'The behavior of the townsmen of Sodom does not legitimize the deity's severe punishment or their total destruction. Their wish "to know" is completely regular. Yet what is at stake here is the right to judge.'<sup>23</sup> Her conclusion is as follows

the people who are crying out are the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. These people could not have directed their outcry to YHWH, whom they did not know. Nevertheless YHWH initiates a legal inquest. Because the narrator shares in these chapters of Genesis only the perspective of Abraham and his family, and not the perspective of the Canaanites of whom the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah are the most representative rulers, the intended Israelite audience understands the message of this text, namely, that YHWH is the

<sup>17</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 195.

<sup>18</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 196.

<sup>19</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 196.

<sup>20</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> Van Wolde does not argue for this, but citing Morschauer, suggests it may be the case. For her it is a side point. See van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 197; and Morschauer, pp. 474–82.

<sup>22</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 197.

<sup>23</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 199.

superior judge who has chosen Abraham and his offspring as the righteous owners and rulers of the land that until now is under Canaanite rule and jurisdiction. The behavior the Sodomites are accused of is not that they are intending sexual assault, but that they consider YHWH's messengers as spies, Lot as an intruder who wants to judge them, and more importantly, that they do not acknowledge YHWH as the judge of all the earth or the Abraham family as the rightful owners and rulers of the land.<sup>24</sup>

Van Wolde fields a linguistic argument that makes claims about the meaning of the text. The threat of such an interpretation is that it claims to be a *translation*. It concerns the understanding of the vocabulary and grammar of the text and therefore could be presented as part of the 'ordinary means' for understanding Scripture.<sup>25</sup> In such a manner one may feel their ability to understand Scripture based on a translation is questionable. How can the average evangelical judge between interpretations? Can they adequately understand their own Bible?

## EVANGELICAL INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLES

The answer to this conundrum, I suggest, is the same it always has been. The ordinary means includes not only translation, but also the mediation of biblical interpreters, subordinate standards (such as the Westminster Confession of Faith), traditional interpretations, all of these things *as far as they align with the light of Scripture itself*.<sup>26</sup>

The key then is determining whether a 'translation' aligns with the light of Scripture. Ultimately all translation involves some level of interpretation,<sup>27</sup> so the question is now: Is this interpretation better than

<sup>24</sup> van Wolde, 'Cognitive Grammar at Work in Sodom and Gomorrah', p. 203.

<sup>25</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, ed. by Banner of Truth Trust (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), sec. 1.7; Martin Luther, 'The Bondage of the Will', in *Career of the Reformer III*, ed. & trans. by Philip S. Watson, Luther's Works (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), xxxiii, 3–295 (p. 25).

<sup>26</sup> Luther, xxxiii, p. 91; Wayne Grudem, 'The Perspicuity of Scripture', *Themelios*, 34.3 (2009), 288–308 (pp. 296–97); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), pp. 143–46; Philip D. Foster, 'Making Clear the Doctrine of the Clarity of Scripture', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 35.2 (2017), 172–85 (pp. 175, 180).

<sup>27</sup> We can essentially refer to any *interpretation* as a *translation* in the light of Cognitive Linguistic theory. Others also have affirmed the idea that any communication involves translation from one person to another. See George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd edn (Oxford:

the traditional interpretations? We can examine this question effectively using the following principle outlined in the Westminster Confession:

IX. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.<sup>28</sup>

However, to apply the principle above we must be able to trust our ability to understand the words of Scripture. This trust need not be for perfect understanding, but rather for adequate understanding. To suggest that some amount of misunderstanding negates the possibility of any certainty of understanding is a child of scepticism; taken to its conclusion we would end up in the same place as the Academicians of Ancient Greece who taught that the wise person should affirm nothing.<sup>29</sup> Such a position is absurd.

Just as it is absurd to say we can affirm nothing, it would be absurd to say that many faithful translators in the past failed utterly in translating the Bible. Similarly, it would be absurd to say that we can know nothing of the meaning of the words we read because we do not live in the right culture. Rather we can know *something* of what it means, just not *everything*.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, we can to some small degree become enculturated in the biblical world through a thorough reading of Scripture. From this starting point we can use what we have in imperfect translations to examine another imperfect (although perhaps more accurate) translation.<sup>31</sup>

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Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 49; and Vanhoozer, 'Translating Holiness: Forms of Word, Writ and Righteousness', p. 385.

<sup>28</sup> Westminster Assembly, sec. 1.9; this idea is also present in Augustine's thought, although in his application it generally involves allegorical interpretation; Augustine of Hippo, 'On Christian Doctrine', in *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. by Philip Schaff, trans. by J. F. Shaw, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 1, 14 vols (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), ii, 522–97 (sec. 2.9.14).

<sup>29</sup> Augustine of Hippo, 'Against the Academicians', in *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. by Peter King (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 1–93 (secs. 3.4.10.90–100).

<sup>30</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 463–67.

<sup>31</sup> I have argued here as though Scripture were a purely human text. Where the faithful and prayerful believer is involved, and with the oversight of the Holy Spirit this position is surely all the more firm.



## SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

I will demonstrate application of this principle by first examining van Wolde's analysis of 'outcry', then 'know' and finally her comments concerning Lot and God's judicial positions.

Van Wolde's presentation of the meaning of *outcry* is problematic. She is right in what she says about the other uses of the word. This method can be a powerful tool in disambiguating meaning. However, her comment on the context is surely misplaced. A cognitive linguistic perspective on language *requires* that literary context be taken into account.<sup>32</sup> The literary context has a powerful effect in constraining word meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Given that context is so important, we can proceed to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Earlier within the narrative (Gen. 13:13) we were told that the people<sup>34</sup> of Sodom were very bad and sinful. This sets up expectations about Sodom and Gomorrah. In the very same verse as the first use of *outcry* (Gen. 18:20) God informs Abraham that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is very grave. In the second use of *outcry* (Gen. 18:21) we find out that it is in response to something that Sodom and Gomorrah had supposedly done. This context does not leave room for claiming that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (who were being investigated) were crying out in distress. In addition, we can see the similarities between the language of Genesis 18:20–21 and that of Jonah 1:2. In Genesis, the outcry comes to God, and in Jonah the evil of Nineveh comes before God. In both of these cases there is the threat of judgement on the sinners.

<sup>32</sup> For example, see Cruse's dynamic construal of meaning. Alan Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*, Oxford Textbooks in Linguistics, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 119–24.

<sup>33</sup> Not to mention the fact that the particular Hebrew grammatical construction which is used here can be validly interpreted in the way it is interpreted in the translations. Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd edn (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), sec. 25.4.2.

<sup>34</sup> Peterson argues that it was specifically the *men* of Sodom due to the use of the term *'anashim*. However, there are instances where this term clearly includes men and women (Job 42:11; 1 Chr. 16:3). Given these occurrences and how other gendered terms function in Biblical Hebrew we should be cautious at saying this group excludes women. Brian Neil Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom: Reading Genesis 19 as Torah* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), p. 34.

***Knowing in Context***

Concerning the use of the verb 'know' we can also rely on Scripture to interpret Scripture. There is little problem acknowledging that 'know' has a special meaning in Genesis 18:19.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the context renders any attempt to use either the normal translation of 'know' or the sexual euphemism untenable. God 'knows' Abraham so that he will command his children to follow God in righteousness and justice. However, what about Genesis 19:5 which has traditionally been taken to refer to sexual intercourse? Van Wolde's argument is that this use of 'know' is also judicial because of the wider judicial context of the text.

I would argue that the key is in comparing Genesis 19:5 with Judges 19:22. Van Wolde ignores this parallel, instead arguing about the surrounding language of Genesis 19:5.<sup>36</sup> However, applying the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture means we should make careful note of the parallel account. Additionally, from a cognitive linguistic perspective, this parallel is particularly important: the events can be compared as examples of Ancient Hebrew cognition in context.<sup>37</sup>

In examining the parallel account we see that in both accounts the event starts in the same way. The men of the city come to the house and surround it (Gen. 19:4; Judg. 19:22).<sup>38</sup> Using *the same language* the men call the hosts to bring out the visitors so they may *know* them (Gen. 19:5;

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Amos 3:2 which seems to have the same use.

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 41 below for problems with van Wolde's identification of judicial language here. Morschauser, who van Wolde references (but not on this issue), brushes off the idea these two accounts can be compared. In my view Morschauser does not adequately deal with the similarities of the texts. See Morschauser, p. 471.

<sup>37</sup> If someone was to object and say that the judicial narrative context of Genesis 18–19 renders the parallel questionable we could answer that within the judicial narrative there is a sub-narrative at Sodom which foregrounds a hospitality event, not a judicial event. This is directly comparable to the Judges 19 account.

<sup>38</sup> Morschauser argues that the group in Judges 19 contained a different demographic 'the sons of Belial'. In Judges 19:22 we read in the ESV 'the men of the city, worthless fellows'. As can be seen as clearly in the translation as in the original, 'the men of the city' is in apposition to 'worthless fellows' (sons of Belial). We are invited to think of the men of the city as worthless. It paints all the men of Gibeah with the same broad stroke, this is not a particular subset of 'worthless fellows', but some (or all) of the men of the city, and they are 'worthless fellows'. This is similar to how the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were presented in Genesis 13:13 and 18:20–21 only we had not been informed of the moral standing of the men of Gibeah until this point. See Morschauser, p. 480.

Judg. 19:22). In both accounts the host steps out and calls on his 'brothers' not to act so wickedly (Gen. 19:7; Judg. 19:23). Then both hosts suggest bringing out women instead (Gen. 19:8; Judg. 19:24). Here the stories diverge. In the Judges narrative the host adds 'violate them' to his proposal (Judg. 19:24), which is exactly what the men do to the Levite's concubine after she is cast out (Judg. 19:25–26).

We can illuminate the language of 'know' by using the responses of the characters in the narrative itself (hence Ancient Hebrew cognition in context). Both the hosts were responding to basically the same circumstances *and* language use.<sup>39</sup> The more specific language in the host's proposal in Judges 19:24 (violate them) can be used to interpret Lot's language in Genesis 19:8. They are both presenting women to be used for a sexual purpose. The continuation of the Judges narrative validates this understanding 'And they *knew* her and abused her all night' (Judg. 19:25), so we know the host in Judges did not misunderstand their intent.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, it is only logical to assume that Lot did not misinterpret the intent of the Sodomites.<sup>41</sup> This assumption is strengthened by the New Testa-

<sup>39</sup> Someone might object that the Sodomites in the time of Lot spoke a different language to the Benjaminites of Gibeah in the time of Judges, but both texts were written to be understood by the Ancient Hebrew speaker and so the Canaanite language Lot and the Sodomites shared is irrelevant to the problem. What is important is how the Ancient Hebrew speaker understood the text, and the above analysis demonstrates the congruence between the Genesis and Judges accounts and how they would be understood in the same light.

<sup>40</sup> Contrary to Ron Pirson's who analyses the language of the offenders in both Genesis and Judges and concludes that in both instances they did not have sexual intent. He does not address the fact that the men in Judges appeared to accept the offer of the concubine. Victor Matthews does address this, but does so by suggesting that the legal situation is not well defined as the men of Gibeah are presented as 'a gang of hooligans', but this interpretation suggests there is no difference in the language (which contradicts Pirson). See Ron Pirson, 'Does Lot Know about Yada?', in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah: Essays in Memory of Ron Pirson*, ed. by Diana Lipton and Ron Pirson, Ancient Israel and Its Literature, 11 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 203–13 (p. 210); see also Victor H. Matthews, 'Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 22 (1992), 3–11 (p. 5).

<sup>41</sup> Pietro Bovati's examples of the verb 'know' in judicial contexts seems to suggest that it should occur in parallel with another verb of investigation or contain a different object, such as *knowing the heart* of someone. Van Wolde acknowledges this, but does not seem to appreciate its likely significance. See Pietro Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice: Legal Terms, Concepts, and Procedures*

ment account where the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is explicitly said to involve sexual immorality (Jude 7).<sup>42</sup>

### ***Lot and God's Judicial Positions***

Concerning Lot taking a judicial position in the gate the interpretation may bring useful insight. There are numerous examples of sitting in the gate referring to some judicial position or place for judgement.<sup>43</sup> Lot is clearly a sojourner in Sodom and the passage is within a judicial narrative. However, this might not mean Lot was taking a judicial position, he may have merely been doing business at the time (cf. Gen. 23:18; Ruth 4:1–9). The reference to judicial position may be intended as allusion by the narrator rather than indicating that Lot had assumed this position on himself or had it conferred on him.

In Genesis 19:1–3 Lot appears to (perhaps anxiously) press the angels to stay. Considering this comment in the context of the recognised sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20b) and that Lot has lived there some time, we may consider it certain that Lot knows the men and their wickedness and this is why he wanted to get the travellers out of the square. In doing this he is judging the behaviour of the Sodomites as wicked. This is what angers the Sodomites in Genesis 19:9 — a sojourner presuming to counsel them on what is right. However, Lot is vindicated by the angels who act to protect him and his family (Gen. 19:10–11).

Van Wolde is incorrect in asserting the text sees Abraham's family as the (current) rightful owners of the land. In Genesis 26:3 God says to Isaac 'Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your offspring I *will* give all these lands...'. Clearly the land was not yet the property of Abraham's family in the narrative of the text.

In some sense, van Wolde's argument about God as judge rings true. The men of Sodom are judged for not recognising God as judge of all

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*in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. by Michael J. Smith, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 105 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1994), pp. 244–46; Ellen J. van Wolde, 'Outcry, Knowledge, and Judgement in Genesis 18–19', in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah: Essays in Memory of Ron Pirson*, ed. by Diana Lipton and Ron Pirson, Ancient Israel and Its Literature, 11 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 71–100 (p. 92). Interestingly, John Calvin argued that while they were seeking sexual intercourse, the verb *know* here did not imply sexual intercourse. John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. by John King (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), pp. 497–98.

<sup>42</sup> Peterson examines the interpretation of the sin of Sodom across extra-biblical and New Testament texts. See Peterson, pp. 99–114.

<sup>43</sup> Genesis 23:10; Ruth 4:1; 2 Samuel 19:8; 1 Kings 22:10; Proverbs 31:23.

the earth. However, contrary to van Wolde, the behaviour of the men of Sodom *does* legitimise the punishment. What is right in their eyes does not align with what is right in God's eyes. The angels investigate the outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah and confirm their sin which is then the basis for its destruction. God succeeds in his purpose of going and seeing whether they had done according to the outcry (Gen. 18:21).

## CONCORD BETWEEN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In this article I have examined one case study of interpretation using Cognitive Linguistics. Although a number of points were found in the interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah episode that did not appear to sit well, the interpretation also contained helpful insights. The judicial context means that the behaviour of the Sodomites can be seen as a perversion of justice: they were destroyed not because of one particular act, but because of a pattern of behaviour which was verified through one instance.

Cognitive Linguistics is a useful tool for interpretation. Although many facets of the interpretation critiqued above were considered false, a cognitive linguistic understanding was employed in the critique itself (although the conclusions could be reached without knowing the theory of language being employed). Cognitive linguistic theory foregrounds the importance of cultural background in understanding texts. It reminds us that the biblical culture is not our culture, that the words of the Bible are not our words. Thus archaeological, geographical, cultural, linguistic and other studies can provide valuable information for interpretation. Acknowledging this can help us to come to a clearer understanding of the bible. However, as with all interpretation, it is the work of an interpreter. Therefore a cognitive linguistic interpretation must measure up to the bar of the Scriptures it seeks to interpret. Cognitive Linguistics can, therefore, be used profitably as a tool in conjunction and cooperation with the principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture.

The layperson can prayerfully, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, read the words of Scripture for themselves, in their own language, and check the claims of the academy against this mediated form. If the claims regarding the text sit well within the canonical context then the reader can (always provisionally) affirm what has been claimed. They need not fear to read and interpret Scripture themselves. However, due to their own limitations as an interpreter (and every interpreter has limitations),<sup>44</sup> the

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<sup>44</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 463–67.

layperson may show wisdom in turning to other sources of the ordinary means — be that in the form of books (written by those committed to the faith), church leaders, or other sources to help them weigh arguments they hear. It is also important to acknowledge with Martin Luther, the role of the church as the locus of interpretation: ‘Thus we say that all the spirits are to be tested in the presence of the Church at the bar of Scripture.’<sup>45</sup> Whatever interpretations we may come to are to be tested not just at the bar of Scripture, but also in the presence of the church.

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<sup>45</sup> Luther, xxxiii, p. 91; Vanhoozer talks about the importance of the interpretation of Scripture in the presence of the church, see Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority after Babel*, pp. 210–11, 232.