

Genesis 18:22 & the *Tiqqune Sopherim*: Textual, Midrashic, and for What Purpose?

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to make an inquiry into the *tiqqun sopherim* at Genesis 18:22 which is registered in the later lists of the *tiqqune sopherim*. Included in this investigation will be: (1) a brief discussion of the two prominent terms used in the rabbinic lists when speaking of textual emendations, i.e., כִּינְנַח הַכְּתוּב, *kiynnah haketuv* and תִּיקוּן סוֹפְרִים, *tikkun sopherim*, (2) a survey of the textual witnesses to Gen 18:22, (3) a survey of the rabbinic *midrashim* which either note the *tiqqun* of Gen 18:22 or offer interpretative information surrounding Gen 18:22, and (4) a survey of the polemical and/or theological use of Gen 18–19 by Church Fathers, as a possible background or impetus for the *tiqqun* of Gen 18:22.

The *Tiqqun Sopherim* of Gen 18:22 – Textual or Midrashic?

The *tiqqun sopherim* of Gen 18:22 relates to the final line of the verse. In the rabbinic *midrashim* (see below) the final line is said “originally to have been” וַיְהִי עֹדְנֵי עֹדְנֵי עֹדְנֵי לְפָנֵי אַבְרָהָם, “And YHVH remained standing before Abraham” but was emended to וַיְהִי עֹדְנֵי עֹדְנֵי עֹדְנֵי לְפָנֵי יְהוָה, “And Abraham remained standing before YHVH,” ostensibly to remove any notion of degradation to YHVH who stood while Abraham sat.

We begin by noting that the term תִּיקוּן סוֹפְרִים, *tikkun sopherim*, “an amendment/correction of the scribes” is but one of the terms found in the rabbinic literature to identify a scribal “correction” or “emendation” in the Hebrew text. Barnes notes that there are a number of different terms encountered but that two which are most ancient give rise to the rest.

The terms used in our authorities with regard to these passages are many; *tikkun sopherim* is only one form out of a dozen. Yet a careful scrutiny leaves us with two formulas only which are ancient, from which all the rest appear to be derived.¹

These two formulas are כִּינְנַח הַכְּתוּב, *kiynnah haketuv*, “the Scripture employed a euphemism” and תִּיקוּן סוֹפְרִים, *tikkun sopherim*, “correction of scribes.” The formula *kiynnah haketuv* is found in the lists of *Mechilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*² on Ex 15:7–8, in *Siphre* on Num 10:35,³ and in *Ochlah veOchlah*, List 168.⁴ Other lists utilizing the formula *kiynnah haketuv* are found in the *Yalqut Shime’oni*, and *Siphra Zutta*.⁵

The formula תִּיקוּן סוֹפְרִים (*tikkun sopherim*) appears first in the *Tanchuma* on Ex 15:7–8. The collection of *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* midrashim includes:

Tanchuma (to the entire Pentateuch), extensive parts of *Exodus Rabbah*, *Numbers Rabbah*, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* and *Pesiqta Rabbati*.⁶

The date of the *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* collection of midrashim is debated. Early scholars made conflicting statements about the date and identity of the “early” *Tanchuma* or *Yelammedenu* materials, which they thought to

¹ W. E. Barnes, “Ancient Corrections in the Text of the Old Testament (*Tikkun Sopherim*), *JTS*, vol. 1 (1899–1900), 402. [This article is also reprinted in Sid Z. Leiman, ed., *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible* (KTAV, 1974), pp. 379–414.

² J. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 3 vols. (JPS, 1933), 2.42–43.

³ For an English translation, see Jacob Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers* (Scholars Press, 1986), 2.72–73.

⁴ Z. Frensdorf, *Das Buch Ochlah w’Ochlah* (Hannover, 1864), List 168, p. 113.

⁵ See Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim* (Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), pp. 30–31.

⁶ Marc Bregman, “Tanchuma Yelammedenu” in *EJ* 2nd Edition (Thomson/Gale, 2006), 19.503.

be the “original” source of the later additions. In regard to the editing of the collection, McCarthy notes:

Any attempt to date this literary genre of Tanchuma Midrashim has to take into account, on the one hand, the fact that it contains many early traditions. On the other hand, the presence of distinct references to anti-Karaite polemics sets a *terminus a quo* of 800 A.D. for the editing of the earliest of the extant texts.⁷

In terms of dating the composition of the *Tanchuma Yelammedenu* collection, Bregman writes:

Tanchuma-Yelammedenu literature is best regarded as a particularly midrashic genre which began to crystallize toward the end of the Byzantine period in Palestine (5–7th century C.E.), but continued to evolve and spread throughout the Diaspora well into the middle ages, sometimes developing different recensions of a common text.⁸

Strack & Stemberger also date the *Tanchuma-Yelammedenu* collection as originating in the 5–7th century C.E.⁹ Hirshman puts the origin of some of the Aggadic Midrashim in the 5th century C.E. and considers the *Midrash Yelammedenu* most likely to have originated in the 6th century C.E. with *Tanchuma* being somewhat later.¹⁰

The general dating of the *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* midrashim is important for our study since Gen 18:22 first appears as a *tiqqun sopherim* in this collection and is absent from the lists of *Siphre* or *Mekhilta*. This in itself may suggest that incorporating Gen 18:22 as one of the “18 *Tiqqune Sopherim*” was a somewhat later decision driven by theological/midrashic criteria rather than based upon a textual tradition. And, once incorporated as a *tiqqun sopherim* in the *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* midrashim, Gen 18:22 continued to be listed among the *tiqqune sopherim* in the Masoretic lists.

In brief, with regard to rabbinic sources, with the exception of the early *kinnuyim* lists of the *Siphre*, *Mekhilta*, etc., there is almost unanimous agreement, accepted and prolonged by Masoretic circles, that Gen 18:22 is a *tiqqun sopherim*.¹¹

The earliest Masoretic manuscript to contain a list of the *tiqqune sopherim* is Codex Petropolitanus Babylonicus, which is dated to c. 916 C.E. and contains the latter prophets. The *tiqqun* list is found twice, once in the Masorah at Ezek 8:17 and the other in the Masorah of Zech 2:12. Both contain the same eighteen occurrences (which includes Gen 18:22), but only the list at Zech 2:12 is headed with the title “Eighteen words, *tiqqun sopherim*.”¹² No “original” readings are supplied in the two lists.

Three Yemenite manuscripts of the British Museum include Gen 18:22 in their list of *tiqqune sopherim*. They are BM Or. 1379, BM Or. 2349, and BM Or. 2365, all of which Ginsburg dates to the 14th century C.E.¹³ In all three, the *tiqqune sopherim* list is given in the Masorah of Num 12:12, and all three list the same eighteen *tiqqune sopherim*, though the order in which the texts are listed is not uniform between the three.

Another manuscript, BM Add. 15,451, which Ginsburg describes as a “magnificent MA,” dated to c. 1200 C.E.,¹⁴ contains a marginal note on five verses, including Gen 18:22, that each of the five is one of the “Eighteen *Tiqqun Sopherim*.” Similarly, the Cairo Codex of the Prophets (895 C.E.) contains eight marginal notes to the effect that each is an instance of “Eighteen Words, *Tiqqun Sopherim* and Wise Men,”¹⁵ but no such note is appended to Gen 18:22.

⁷ Carmel McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim*, Op. cit., p. 33.

⁸ Marc Bregman, “Tanhuma Yelammedenu,” Op. cit., 19.503.

⁹ H. L. Strack; G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrashim* (Fortress, 1992), pp. 313ff.

¹⁰ Marc Hirshman, “Aggadic Midrashim and the Esther Midrashim” in *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum: The Literature of the Sages*, Part 2 (Fortress, 2006), p. 150.

¹¹ McCarthy, *Tiqqune Sopherim*, Op. cit., p. 73.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³ Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (KTAV, 1966), p. 350.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

¹⁵ McCarthy, *The Tiqqune Sopherim*, Op. cit., p. 52.

Another important question to ponder is why the earlier formula (*kiyannah haketuv*) was replaced in the later *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* midrashim and Masoretic sources by the formula *tiqqune sopherim*. Discussing the two formulas, Barnes writes:

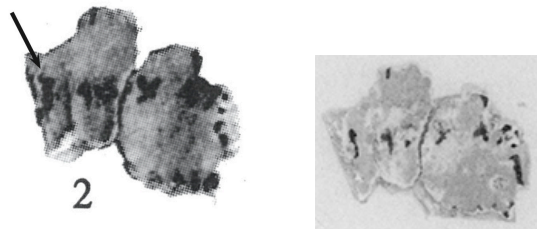
Now the first thing to be noted is that the latter formula [*tiqqune sopherim*] is ambiguous, while the former [*kiyannah haketuv*] bears an unmistakable meaning. The phrase ‘the Scripture has employed euphemism’ is irreconcilable with the theory that the text of the Scripture has been altered by transcribers. It means not that a euphemism has been introduced into Scripture, but that it was already found there and noted. The phrase ‘תִּקְּוֹן סֹפְרֵי’ ‘scribes’ correction’ stands on different ground.¹⁶

From this brief survey it can be seen that Gen 18:22 is not found in the earliest lists of the *kinnuyim* but that once it was included in the *tiqqune sopherim* of the *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* collection, it continued to be listed as one of the “eighteen” in some of the later Masoretic manuscripts. This would seem to open the possibility that Gen 18:22 was not originally included among the *kinnuyim* but was added later to the *tiqqune sopherim* lists as one of the “eighteen.” This in turn may suggest that the impetus for its inclusion in the “eighteen *tiqqune sopherim*” was midrashic rather than text-critical.

Genesis 18:22 in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Versions

If, in fact, the *tiqqun* of Gen 18:22 was based upon an “original” reading of the text which was emended by the scribes, we would expect that the “original” text would be evidenced in the *DSS* and versions which pre-date the rabbinic midrashim and the work of the Masoretes.

• *Dead Sea Scrolls* – Fragments 2 and 3 from Cave 8 (8Q1) contain what the editors of *DJD III* consider to be the text of Gen 18:20–22 of the original manuscript.¹⁷



Their reconstructed transcription of v. 22 is:

[ויפנו משם האנשים וילכו סדמה ואברהם עודנו עמד] לפני יהוה.

The only word readable on the scrap number two is לפני and the first letter of the following word is uncertain. If it were a *yod*, then we would have the earliest pre-Masoretic manuscript evidence that יהוה stands at the conclusion of the clause. Unfortunately, the fragment is too poorly preserved to be certain. Therefore, we gain no conclusive data from the *DSS* regarding the pre-Masoretic text of Gen 18:22.¹⁸

¹⁶ W. E. Barnes, “Ancient Corrections in the Text of the Old Testament (*Tikkun Sopherim*)”, *JTS*, vol. 1 (1899–1900), 403.

¹⁷ Baillet, Milik, de Vaux, *DJD III*, pp. 147–148. Plate XXXI.

¹⁸ Contra McCarthy, who states that Qumran “agrees with the MT” on Gen 18:22. [*The Tikkune Sopherim*, Op. cit., p. 73.]

• The Lxx

καὶ ἀποστρέψαντες ἐκεῖθεν οἱ ἄνδρες ἦλθον εἰς Σοδομα, Ἀβρααμ δὲ ἦν ἐστηκώς ἐναντίον κυρίου. (Rahlfs)¹⁹
καὶ ἀποστρέψαντες ἐκεῖθεν οἱ ἄνδρες ἦλθον εἰς Σόδομα· Ἀβραὰμ δὲ ἦν ἐστηκώς ἐναντίον Κυρίου. (Swete)²⁰
καὶ ἀποστρέψαντες ἐκεῖθεν οἱ ἄνδρες ἦλθον εἰς Σόδομα, Ἀβραὰμ δὲ ἦν ἐστηκώς ἐναντίον κυρίου. (Göttingen)²¹

In consulting the critical apparatus of each of the three editions cited, no variant is noted in any manuscript which places Ἀβραὰμ at the end of the sentence. Thus, all extant witnesses to the Lxx have what the *tiqqun* indicates was the “correction” and not what is stated to have been the “original.”

• Samaritan Pentateuch

ויפנו משם האנושים וילכו סדמה ואברהם עודנו עמד לפני יהוה: (von Gall, Vol. 1, p. 28)
[ויפנו משם האנושים וילכו סדמה ואברהם עודנו עמד לפני יהוה:] (A. Tal, *MS 6 (C) of the Shekhem Synagogue*)

The critical Samaritan text as edited by von Gall²² is identical with the MT. The *MS 6 (C) of the Shekhem Synagogue* edited by A. Tal²³ is defective regarding the final clause of v. 22. However, the manuscripts collated by von Gall show no variation in regard to the final clause of v. 22, always having אברהם as the subject of the verb עמד, thus substantiating that the “original” text suggested by the *tiqqun* in the lists of the rabbinic literature was not known by the translators or editors of the Samaritan Pentateuch.

• Syriac Peshitta

וַאֲתַפְנִי מִן תְּמַן גְּבָרִיא וְאַזְלוּ לְסֻדּוֹם. וְאַבְרָהָם עֹדְכִיל קָאֵם הוּא קִדָּם מְרִיא (Peshitta manuscript 7a1)²⁴
(ואתפניו מן תמן גבריא ואזלו לסדום. ואברהם עדיכיל קאם הוא קדם מריא)

The Syriac Peshitta also represents the reading of the MT, not what the lists of *tiqqune sopherim* indicate was the “original reading” of the final clause of Gen 18:22.

• Targum Onkelos

וַאֲתַפְנִי מִתְּמַן גְּבָרִיא וְאַזְלוּ לְסֻדּוֹם וְאַבְרָהָם עֹד קִדָּם מְרִיא (CAL Project: HUC)²⁵
(Then the men turned from there and went to Sodom, while Abraham was still ministering in his prayer before יהוה.)

Targum Onkelos likewise has the text of the MT and gives no evidence of an “original reading,” as indicated by the *tiqqun*, which read יהוה as the subject of the verb עמד.

¹⁹ Alfred Rahlfs, ed. *Septuaginta*, 2 vols. (Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935).

²⁰ Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint* (Cambridge, 1934).

²¹ J. W. Weavers, ed. “Genesis” in *Vol. 1 – Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum* (Göttingen, 1974). [Text retrieved from Accordance Bible Software.]

²² A. F. von Goll, *Der hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner*, 4 vols. (Giessen, 1914–1918; repr. Berlin, 1966), 1.28.

²³ A. Tal, *The Samaritan Pentateuch: Edited According to MS 6 (C) of the Shekhem Synagogue in Texts and Studies in the Hebrew Language and Related Studies*, 8 (Tel-Aviv Univ., 1994). [Text retrieved from Accordance Bible Software.]

²⁴ The text was digitized by Accordance Bible Software from A. M. Ceriani, *Translatio Syro Pescitto Veteris Testamenti ex codice Ambrosiano sec. fere VI. photolithographice edita* (Apud Williams et Norgate, 1876-1883).

²⁵ The text of *Targum Onkelos* retrieved from Accordance Bible Software, licensed from Hebrew Union College and the *Complete Aramaic Lexicon Project* under the guidance of Stephen A. Kaufmann.

• *The Vulgate*

converteruntque se inde et abierunt Sodomam Abraham vero adhuc stabat coram Domino²⁶

[And they turned themselves from there, and went their way to Sodom: but Abraham as yet stood before the Lord.]

The Vulgate evidences the same base text in its translation as do the other versions, making Abraham the subject of the verb “stabat,” thus giving no evidence of what the *tiqqun* lists offer as an “original” reading that would have placed “Dominus” as the subject of the verb “stabat.”

Summary: Evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Versions

While we cannot be certain of the reading that existed in the Dead Sea Scrolls, since the small fragment containing Gen 18:22 is too poorly preserved, it is clear that no extant pre-Masoretic witness offers any evidence that the original Hebrew of the final clause of Gen 18:22 was וַיְהִי הָיָה עֹדֵנּוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנַי אַבְרָהָם, “And YHVH remained standing before Abraham.” Likewise, all of the versions we have collated agree that the text read וַאֲבָרְהָם עֹדֵנּוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנַי יְהוָה, “And Abraham remained standing before YHVH.”

These data, when combined with the previous discussion showing that Gen 18:22 is not listed as a *tiqqun* until the later *Tanchuma-Yelammedenu* midrashim, seem to offer substantial evidence that the *tiqqun* on Gen 18:22 was not based upon a known text-critical issue, but was formulated out of midrashic concerns.

Genesis 18 and 19:1 in the Midrashim

My purpose in surveying the midrashim which incorporate Gen 18:22 is to attempt to ascertain what the rabbinic teachers intended to gain by marking Gen 18:22 as one of the “eighteen *tiqqune sopherim*” and offering an “original” text which, by all extant textual evidence, never existed.

• *Midrash Rabbah Genesis*²⁷

47.10 אמר אברהם עד שלא מלתי היו העוברים והשבים באים אצלי תאמר משמלתי אינן באים אצלי, אמר לו הקב"ה עד שלא מלת היו בני אדם באים אצלך עכשיו אני בכבודי בא ונגלה עליך הה"ד וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא.

47.10 Abraham said: ‘Before I became circumcised, travellers used to visit me; now that I am circumcised, perhaps they will no longer visit me?’ Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: ‘Before you were circumcised, uncircumcised mortals visited you; now I in My glory will be revealed to you.’ Hence it is written, “And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre” (Gen. 18:1). [vol. 1, p. 405]

The significant term used in this midrash is בכבודי, “in My glory.”²⁸ This, as we shall see, will continue to be one of the key aspects of the midrashim on Gen 18:1.

²⁶ Robert Weber, Roger Gryson, eds. *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam*, 5th edition (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007) [retrieved from Accordance Bible Software].

²⁷ English translation (with my own minor edits) from H. Freedman, trans. *Midrash Rabbah Genesis*, 2 vols. (Soncino, 1983).

²⁸ Cf. Jer 2:11 and the *tiqqun sopherim*, בכבודי altered to כבודו. See also Ginsburg, *Introduction*, Op. cit., p. 356.

48.1 וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא והוא יושב פתח האהל כתיב (תהלים יח) ותתן לי מגן ישעך וימינך תסעדני וענותך תרבני, ותתן לי מגן ישעך זה אברהם, וימינך תסעדני בכבשן האש ברעבון ובמלכים, וענותך תרבני, מה עונה הרבה הקב"ה לאברהם, שהיה יושב והשכינה עומדת, הה"ד וירא אליו ה'.

48.1 AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO HIM (18:1). It is written, You have also given me Your shield of salvation, and Your right hand has raised me up, and Your condescension has made me great (Ps. 18:36). 'You have also given me Your shield of salvation' alludes to Abraham; 'And Your right hand has raised me up—in the fiery furnace, in famine, and in [my battle with] the kings;' 'And Your condescension has made me great': with what condescension did the Lord make Abraham great? In that he sat while the Shechinah stood; thus it is written, "AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO HIM... AS HE SAT. (Gen 18:1)

Here we see that the "glory" God promised to reveal to Abraham in the previous midrash is more specifically designated as השכינה, the "Shechinah."

48.9 אמר עד שלא מלתי היו העוברים והשבים באים אצלי, א"ל הקב"ה עד שלא מלתי היו בני אדם ערלים באים, עכשיו אני ובני פמליא שלי נגלים עליך, הה"ד וישא עיניו וירא והנה שלשה אנשים נצבים עליו, וירא בשכינה וירא במלאכים, א"ר חנינא שמות חדשים עלו מבבל, ריש לקיש אמר אף שמות מלאכים מיכאל רפאל וגבריאל, אמר רבי לוי אחד נדמה לו בדמות סדקי, ואחד נדמה לו בדמות נוטי, ואחד בדמות ערבי, אמר אם רואה אני ששכינה ממתנת עליהם אני יודע שהן בני אדם גדולים, ואם אני רואה אותן חולקים כבוד אלו לאלו אני יודע שהן בני אדם מהוגנין וכיון שראה אותן חולקין כבוד אלו לאלו ידע שהן בני אדם מהוגנין.
48.10 ויאמר אדני אם נא מצאתי חן תני ר' חייא לגדול שבהן אמר זה מיכאל

48.9 He [Abraham] complained: 'Before I was circumcised travellers used to visit me; now that I am circumcised, perhaps they will no longer visit me?' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'Until now uncircumcised mortals visited you; but now I and My retinue will appear to you. Thus it is written, AND HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND LOOKED AND BEHOLD THREE MEN WERE STANDING OPPOSITE HIM (Gen 18:2) – he saw the Shechinah and saw the angels. R. Hanina said: The names of the months came up with us from Babylon. R. Simeon b. Lakish said: Also the names of the angels, Michael, Rafael, and Gabriel. R. Levi said: One appeared to him in the guise of a merchant, the second in the guise of a Nabatean, and the third in the guise of an Arab. Said he [Abraham]: 'If I see that the Shechinah waits for them, I will know that they are worthy; and if I see that they pay respect to each other, I will know that they are distinguished.' And when he did see them pay respect to each other, he knew that they were distinguished...
48.10 AND SAID: MY LORD, IF NOW I HAVE FOUND FAVOR IN YOUR SIGHT (18:3). R. Hiyya taught: He said this to the greatest of them, viz. Michael.

In this midrash R. Levi makes it clear that "the three men" (שלשה אנשים) are three angels who disguise themselves in various ways, and that the Shechinah is distinct from the three, for the condition Abraham proposes is to see whether "the Shechinah waits for them." The picture given in the midrash is that the Shechinah appears first to Abraham and then he saw the three men coming toward his tent.²⁹ Likewise, R. Hiyya identifies the one Abraham addresses as "my LORD" (אֲדֹנָי) to be "the greatest of them, i.e., Michael.

²⁹ In the midrash on Psalm 18 (see below), the order is reversed: the "men" are sent by the Shechinah to attend to Abraham, and the Shechinah comes afterward.

49.7 ויפנו משם האנשים, הדא אמרת אין עורף למלאכים, וילכו סדומה ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה', א"ר סימון תיקון סופרים הוא זה שהשכינה היתה ממתנת לאברהם.

49.7 AND THE MEN TURNED FROM THERE (18:22). This proves that angels have no back. AND THEY WENT TOWARD SODOM; BUT ABRAHAM STOOD YET BEFORE THE LORD. R. Simon said: This is a *tiqqun sopherim*, for the Shechinah was actually waiting for Abraham.

Once again the *midrash* designates the “three men” of v. 2 as being “angels” in distinction from the appearance of YHVH as the Shechinah.

50.2 (איוב כג) והוא באחד ומי ישיבנו ונפשו אותה ויעש, תנא אין מלאך אחד עושה שתי שליחות, ולא שני מלאכים עושים שליחות אחת, ואת אמרת שני, אלא מיכאל אמר בשורתו ונסתלק, גבריאל נשתלח להפוך את סדום, ורפאל להציל את לוט, ויבואו שני המלאכים סדומה, הכא את אמר מלאכים, ולהלן קורא אותן אנשים, אלא להלן שהיתה שכינה על גביהן קראם אנשים, כיון שנסתלקה שכינה מעל גביהן לבשו מלאכות, אמר רבי תנחומא א"ר לוי אברהם שהיה כחו יפה נדמו לו בדמות אנשים, אבל לוט על ידי שהיה כחו רע נדמו לו בדמות מלאכים, אמר רבי חנינא עד שלא עשו שליחותן קראן אנשים משעשו שליחותן מלאכים, א"ר תנחומא לאחד שנטל הגמוניא מן המלך עד שלא הגיע לבית אוריין שלו היה מהלך כפגן כיון שהגיע לבית אוריין שלו היה מהלך כקאלמין כך עד שלא עשו שליחותן קראן אנשים כיון שעשו שליחותן קראן מלאכים.

50.2 [THEN THE TWO ANGELS CAME, etc., Gen 19:1] “But He is at one with Himself (וְהוּא בְּאֶחָד), and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He does” (Job 23:13).³⁰ It was taught: One angel does not perform two missions, nor do two angels together perform one mission, yet you read that two [angels came to Sodom]? The fact is, however, that Michael announced his tidings [to Abraham] and departed: Gabriel was sent to overturn Sodom, and Rafael to rescue Lot; hence, THEN THE TWO ANGELS CAME TO SODOM

Here you call them angels, whereas earlier they were termed men? Earlier, when the Shechinah was above them, they were men; but as soon as the Shechinah departed from them they assumed the form of angels. R. Levi said: To Abraham, whose [religious] strength was great, they looked like men; but to Lot they appeared as angels, because his strength was feeble. R. Hunia said: Before they performed their mission they were called men; having performed their mission, they assumed the style of angels. R. Tanhuma said: They may be likened to a man who received a governorship from the king. Before he reaches the seat of his authority, he goes like an ordinary citizen. Similarly, before they performed their mission, they are called men; having performed it, they assumed the style of angels.

In the midrash on Gen 19:1, the obvious issue that confronts the rabbis is that only two of the “three men” mentioned in 18:2 have left to go to Sodom and here they are specifically called *mal'achim* (שְׁנֵי הַמְּלָאכִים). This would indicate that in the previous narrative, the statement of 18:22, “Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom” applied to only two of the three, with the third “man” remaining behind with Abraham and is the one conversing with him. But the midrash on 19:1 is constructed in order to interpret the text in such a way so as to have all three of the men leaving Abraham to go to Sodom, and it was the Shechinah that remained behind and conversed with Abraham.

³⁰ Understanding the phrase וְהוּא בְּאֶחָד to mean “And He (God) performs His purpose through one (angel).”

Midrash Shemot, XLI.4

הוי וענותך תרבני, אמר ר' סימון בא וראה מה כתיב (בראשית יח) ויקמו משם האנשים וישקיפו על פני סדום וגו' לא היה צריך לומר אלא זה' עודנו עומד לפני אברהם אלא תקון סופרים הוא, הוי וענותך תרבני, ד"א וענותך תרבני

'*And your condescension has made me great.*' (Ps 18:36). R. Simon said: Just see what it says, And the men rose from thence, and looked out toward Sodom, etc. (Gen. 18:16). One would have expected to find 'And the Lord stood yet before Abraham', but this is due to an emendation of the Scribes; thus this is a further instance of 'Your condescension has made me great'.

Midrash Tehillim (on Psalm 18)

§22 ואימתי [בא עמו בתמימות], בשעה שאמר אל נא תעבור מעל עבדך (שם בראשית יח ג), מה כתיב תמן, ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה' (שם בראשית י"ח כב), אמר ר' סימון תקון סופרים הוא זה, שכינה היתה ממתנת לו, עד שנפנה מן המלאכים

§22 – When did Abraham go to God with singleness of heart? When he said: *My Lord, if now I have found favor in Your sight, pass not away, I pray You, from Your servant* (Gen 18:3). And what does Scripture say further on this passage? *Abraham stood yet before the Lord* (Gen 18:22). This reading, according to R. Simon, represents a *tiqqun sopherim*, for it was the Shechinah which waited [single-hearted] for Abraham until he finished attending the angels.

§29 אמר ר' סימון בשעה שנגלה הקב"ה על אברהם, היה מצטער על מילתו, אמר הקב"ה למלאכים לכו אצלנו, ונטפל להם השכינה, ומעכבת לו עד שהלכו המלאכים, שנאמר ויפנו משם האנשים וילכו סדומה ואברהם עודנו עומד לפני ה' (בראשית יח כב), אמר ר' סימון תקון סופרים הוא זה, שהשכינה עומדת וממתנת לו, לכך נאמר וענותך תרבני.

§29 – R. Simon taught: When the Holy One, blessed be He, appeared to Abraham, Abraham was in pain because of his [recent] circumcision. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels: "Go to him"; and the Shechinah followed them and tarried near Abraham until the angels were gone, as is said *The men turned from thence, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before the Lord* (Gen 18:22). R. Simon said, "This is a *tiqqun soferim*, for the Shechinah was standing and waited for Abraham." Hence it is said *Your gentleness has made me great.* [Ps 18:36]

Summary of the Midrashim Surveyed

The following summary points may be gleaned from the Midrashim surveyed:

1. In *Midrash Rabbah Genesis*, the glory of God, that is, the Shechinah, appeared to Abraham and is noted to be distinct from the "three men" who approached Abraham's tent.
2. Moreover, the "three men" are in reality three angels, and are identified as Michael, Rafael, and Gabriel. When in 18:3 Abraham address one of them as "LORD" (אֲדֹנָי), R. Hiyya teaches that he addressed the

³¹ English translation of *Midrash Tehillim* is based upon: William G. Braude, trans., *The Midrash on Psalms*, 2 vols. (Yale Univ. Press, 1959), 1.250f.

greatest of the three, i.e., Michael. It is significant that in the MT, אֲדֹנָי (written with *chametz*) is used by Abraham, which seems out of place when addressing an angel.

3. Gen 19:1 states that “the two angels came to Sodom in the evening” (וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמְּלָאכִים סָדְמָה בְּעֶרְב), which poses a problem for the view that all three men left for Sodom. The midrash seeks to overcome this problem by positing that “Michael” left for Sodom first and was followed later by the other two angels. This is based upon a midrashic use of Job 23:13 which is interpreted to mean “God performs His purpose through one,” that is, He does not send two angels to accomplish a singular task but each angel is sent for a particular duty. Thus, Michael came to announce his tidings to Abraham and then departed, Gabriel was sent to destroy Sodom, and Rafael went to rescue Lot. What this midrash seeks to establish is clear: all three went to Sodom leaving Abraham and the incorporeal Shechinah to converse, a dialog which comprises vv. 23–32 of the narrative in Gen 18.
4. In *Midrash Shemot*, R. Simon appeals to the “original text” of Gen 18:22 (noting that the written text is one of the *tiqqun sopherim*) to teach the condescension of the Almighty, since He was waiting for Abraham to return from bidding farewell to the men as they left to go toward Sodom. In *Midrash Tehillim*, R. Judah (in the context previous to the quote given above) seeks to show that Abraham possessed all of the positive qualities enumerated in Ps 18:26–27 (mercy, singleness of heart, purity, and subtlety), and he does so by appealing to Gen 18:3. That the Lord deals single-heartedly with those who are single-hearted is proven from 18:22, being mindful of the *tiqqun sopherim*, and thus “the Shechinah was standing [single-heartedly] and waiting for Abraham,” illustrating the words of the Psalmist, “Your gentleness [condescension] has made me great” (וַעֲנוּתְךָ תִרְבֵּנִי, Ps 18:36).
5. In summary, it appears that the primary impetus of the Midrashim on Gen 18 is to make a clear distinction between the three men/angels who approach the tent of Abraham, and God Himself, Who appears to Abraham “in His glory,” i.e., as the Shechinah and thus entirely apart from any bodily form. Moreover, the appeal to the *tiqqun sopherim* in v. 22 is necessary to maintain the distinction, for if the “original” text had the Shechinah still standing before Abraham even though he was accompanying the “men” as they left to go toward Sodom (v. 16), this would emphasize that the Shechinah is not bound by physical restraints but is omnipresent, standing before Abraham wherever he might be.³²

Some Remarks on the MT of Genesis 18 and 19:1-2

1. The opening words of the narrative, וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה, “And YHVH appeared to him...” are followed in the next sentence by וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו, “And he lifted his eyes and looked and behold, three men were standing opposite him...” Then, in 18:3, *L (BHS)* has Abraham addressing one of the three men as אֲדֹנָי, the plural form of אֲדֹנָי written with final *qametz*, always reserved as a “plural of majesty” and referring to YHVH (: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֶל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ:), “And he said, ‘ADONAI, if now I have found grace in Your eyes, please do not pass by from before Your servant.’”). In regard to the lengthening of the final vowel in אֲדֹנָי to *qametz*, Quell remarks:

The extension of the ā may be traced to the concern of the Massorettes to mark the word as sacred by a small outward sign.³³

³² See McCarthy, *Tiqqune Sopherim*, p. 70.

³³ Quell, “αὐτός” in *TDNT*, 3.1060–61. See also the work of Eissfeldt on “אֲדֹנָי” in *TDOT*, 1.62ff, who considers it probable that the plural form with final *qametz* vowel originated for the purpose of affirming יהוה to be the “Lord of all.”

What these data make clear is that in this pericope, Abraham has open dialog with YHVH, and the Hebrew narrative would naturally be understood to indicate that YHVH appeared to Abraham as one of the three men who approached his tent.

3. In 18:9 the word אֱלֹי is marked in the Mp as נְקוּד בְּתוֹרָה, “one of the ten words with extra *nikkud* in the Torah.” While we cannot know precisely the state of the Hebrew text the rabbis had before them as they constructed their midrashim, it appears probable that in large measure, the text eventually codified by the Masoretes was known by the rabbis.³⁸ For instance, in *Mid. Rab. Genesis* 48.15 (on Gen 18:9), the dictum of R. Simeon b. Eleazar is referenced regarding the *puncta extaordinaria* on the word אֱלֹי.³⁹

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו אִי־הָיָה שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ וְגו', אֶל־יָי וְיִי וְיִי וְיִי נְקוּד לִמ"ד אֵינוּ נְקוּד אִמֵּר ר"ש בֶּן אֱלֵעָזָר בְּכֹל מְקוֹם שֶׁאֵתָהּ מוֹצֵא כֹתֵב רַבָּה עַל הַנְּקוּדָה אֵתָהּ דּוֹרֵשׁ אֵת הַכֹּתֵב, נְקוּדָה רַבָּה עַל הַכֹּתֵב אֵתָהּ דּוֹרֵשׁ אֵת הַנְּקוּדָה, כֹּאֵן שֶׁהַנְּקוּדָה רַבָּה עַל הַכֹּתֵב אֵתָהּ דּוֹרֵשׁ אֵת הַנְּקוּדָה, אֵינוּ אֲבָרְהָם, אֵינוּ עֲזַרְיָה כִּשְׁם שֶׁאִמְרוּ אִי־הָיָה שָׂרָה כִּךְ אִמְרוּ לְשָׂרָה אֵינוּ אֲבָרְהָם

AND THEY SAID UNTO HIM (אֱלֹי): WHERE IS SARAH YOUR WIFE (18:9)? The *alef*, *yod*, and *waw* are dotted, but the *lamed* is not dotted. R. Simeon b. Eleazar said: Wherever you find the plain writing exceeding the dotted letters, you must interpret the plain writing; if the dotted letters exceed the plain writing, you must interpret the dotted letters. Here that the dotted letters exceed the undotted,⁴⁰ you must interpret the dotted text. Thus, [the angels asked Sarah,] ‘Where is he—Abraham? R. ‘Azariah said: Just as they said to Abraham, ‘WHERE IS SARAH,’ so they said to Sarah, ‘Where is Abraham?’

Given the fact that R. Simeon B. Eleazar knew of the *nikkud* on אֱלֹי in Gen 18:9, there is every possibility that the five appearances of אֱדָנִי in this same pericope (vv. 3, 27, 30, 31, 32) were understood by the rabbis to refer to יהוה, i.e., being differentiated from the common plural form written with final *patach*, i.e., אֱדָנִי.

In 19:18, what at first may appear to be an exception to the rule, that אֱדָנִי is used to address YHVH, here אֱדָנִי must be understood as the common אֱדָנִי, “lords,” with final *patach* lengthened to *qametz* since the word is *pausal*, being marked with *silluq* followed by *sof pasuq*. Pausal forms regularly lengthen the final vowel.⁴¹ Thus, וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹט אֲלֵהֶם אֱדָנִי, “And Lot said to them, ‘Oh no, my lords.’” Since, however, the *pausal* form of אֱדָנִי is ambiguous, some would take it as a divine epithet, requiring emending אֱלֹי to אֱלֵהֶם.⁴²

4. The common narrative pattern in the MT of 18:22 is important to notice. וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְאַבְרָהָם. עוֹדְנוּ עֹמְדֵי לְפָנֵי יְהוָה. The *vav consecutive* construction, וַיִּפְּנוּ... וַיֵּלְכוּ, is interrupted by the final clause of the verse, וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר... and then continues in the next verse, ... וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר... Further, in the final clause of v. 22, עוֹדְנוּ followed by the participle עֹמְדֵי gives the sense of simultaneity,⁴³ i.e., “And the men turned from there and went toward Sodom and Abraham was still standing before YHVH.”

Note the parallel to 18:22 in 19:27 – וַיִּשְׁכַּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר אֶל־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־עָמַד שָׁם אֶת־פָּנָיו יְהוָה: “And Abraham

³⁸ Regarding the proto-masoretic text, see the survey by Kelley, Mynatt, Crawford. *The Masorah of Biblical Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 32-33.

³⁹ See Romain Butin, *The Ten Nequdoth of the Torah* (KTAV, 1969), pp. 62–67, and the “Prolegomenon,” by Shemaryahu Talmon, pp. x-xi.

⁴⁰ There is not full agreement among the lists pertaining to which letters of אֱלֹי have the extra *nikkudot*. Some biblical manuscripts, including L (and thus *BHS*), have all the letters dotted. Most of the rabbinic lists have only the ו, י, א dotted. See Butin, *Op. cit.*, p. 62f.

⁴¹ Cf. Christo H. J. van der Merwe; Jackie A. Naudé; Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Sheffield, 1999), pp. 46–47.

⁴² *BHS* critical apparatus on אֱדָנִי in 19:18 has: “prp אֱלֹי; Speiser writes in regard to 19:18, “The text reads ‘said to them,’ which cannot be right, since immediately afterward Lot is addressing himself to a single companion. The error is probably traceable to the ambiguous *'dny*, which must have been read as a plural.... The context, however, favors *"dōnī*.” (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis in The Anchor Bible* (Doubleday, 1964), p. 141.

⁴³ See Walke, O’Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), p. 625 (§37.6d).

arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood there with the presence of YHVH.” *BHS* proposes inserting וַיֵּלֶךְ following בַּבֹּקֶר in order to make better sense of the preposition אֶל, i.e., that Abraham awoke *and went* to the place where “he had stood there with the presence of YHVH,” but there is no textual evidence to support such an emendation. It is important to note that no *tiqqun sopherim* is listed for this verse.

5. In 19:1 the *BHS* text reads וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בְּעֶרְבַּי, which most English versions translate as “...the two angels came to Sodom in the evening...” The articular הַמַּלְאָכִים, however, with construct שְׁנֵי, surely gives the sense “And two of the angels came to Sodom in the evening,”⁴⁴ which in context would naturally be understood as being two of the three men mentioned in the opening of the narrative pericope, i.e., in 18:2. This likewise would indicate that the third man who remained behind is pictured in the narrative as YHVH with whom Abraham conversed.

Summary of Remarks on the MT of Gen 18 & 19

In general, these few remarks dealing with a number of verses in this pericope have once again reinforced that the text expects the reader to view YHVH as one of the “three men” who initially approached Abraham’s tent, and that the event introduced in the opening verse of Gen 18, which states that “YHVH appeared to Abraham,” is explained and developed in the subsequent narrative in which Abraham engages in open dialog with YHVH while the other two men/angels go to Sodom. Moreover, that the Masoretes have Abraham addressing YHVH as אֲדֹנָי gives ample evidence that the tradition they preserved in the text was that Abraham and YHVH met face to face. And, it seems clear that the rabbinic authorities who are credited with authoring the midrashim were familiar with the textual traditions codified by the Masoretes.

When the MT of Gen 18 and 19 is compared with the general interpretations set forth in the midrashim we have surveyed, it becomes evident that one of the primary tenants of the rabbinic teaching is to offer an interpretation of this pericope which distances YHVH from anthropomorphic descriptions, and even more, which keeps YHVH from being viewed as corporeal. Consistent in the midrashim is the view that YHVH remains completely distinct from the “three men” who arrive at Abraham’s tent, for YHVH appears as the Shechinah, not as one of the three men.

Regarding the rabbinic view of the Shechinah, Unterman notes:

Shekhinah (שְׁכִינָה), lit. “dwelling,” “resting”), or Divine Presence, refers most often in the rabbinic literature to the numinous immanence of God in the world....One of the more prominent images associated with the Shekhinah is that of light.

The term, though seemingly hypostatized in certain passages, must be viewed purely figuratively and not as representing a separate aspect of God or as being in any sense a part of the Godhead. The latter notion is totally alien to the strict monotheism of rabbinic Judaism for which the unity of the divine Essence is a basic premise.⁴⁵

As we seek to understand the factors that may have compelled the rabbis to propose a *tiqqun sopherim* in Gen 18:22, it seems valuable to consider the Jewish-Christian polemics which existed in the earlier centuries and became dominant in the very period when the *tiqqun sopherim* of Gen 18:22 appears to have originated, i.e., during the development of the *Tanchuma–Yelammedenu* midrashim, in the late 5th–7th centuries CE.

Marc Bregman has noted the influence of such polemics in the formative stages of rabbinic literature. In the conclusion to his article on “Mishnah as Mystery” (משנה כמסטיריון), he comments about Kí Tiśśā’ in the *Tanchuma* midrash in which R. Judah bar Shalom describes how Moses asked the Holy One that the Mishnah be written down, but the divine response was that in the future the Gentiles would translate the Torah and read it in Greek,

⁴⁴ See Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, §134a; G. J. Spurrell, *Notes on the Text of Genesis* (Oxford, 1896), p. 184.

⁴⁵ Alan Unterman, “Shekhinah” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2nd Edition, 18.440.

and then would declare “We are Israel,” and so the scales would be even. Thus,

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the nations: ‘You aver that you are my children? I cannot tell; only they who possess my arcana (מסתורין, *mistôrîn*) are My children.’ Which are these? – the Mishnah.

Bregman comments:

The foregoing attempt to set a tradition attributed to R. Yehudah bar Shalom in its historical and ideological context has larger methodological implications for the study of Rabbinic literature in general and the investigation of the Tanhuma-Yelammedenu midrashim in particular. We have here an example of an anti-Christian Rabbinic tradition that seems best understood in light of a Patristic doctrine documented from the second half of the fourth century.⁴⁶

Commenting on this same passage from *Tanchuma*, Urbach writes:

It is clear that this dictum explains the superiority of the Oral Torah as an answer to the claims of Christianity following upon Paul’s statement concerning the Church as the true heir of Israel, since it is the son of the free woman, while Israel according to the flesh is at most the son of the bondwoman (Gal 3:26; Rom 2:28). The Fathers of the Christian Church, from Justin to Augustine, claimed that the Book of Books is no longer the property and heritage of the Jews.⁴⁷

It seems warranted, therefore, to include a survey of some of the Church Fathers who used Gen 18 as a polemic to substantiate an OT basis for the doctrine of a divine incarnation.

***Examples of the Use of Gen 18–19 by Some of the Church Fathers*⁴⁸**

Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) – “Dialogue with Trypho”

The issue of whether “Trypho the Jew” is a fictitious character manufactured by Justin to write his *Dialogue* is not the most important question to consider as we seek historical evidence for the early polemics waged between the Jewish communities and the Christian Church. Commenting on Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, Wilson writes:

There are several issues tangled together here. Whether the debate reflects an actual conversation and whether Trypho was a historical personage—once thought to be significant matters—are of far less interest than a judgment on whether Trypho is a plausible representation of at least one strain of Judaism and whether the Dialogue gives a proper sense of the issues and the arguments that would have concerned Jews and Christians engaged in debate in the mid-second century. Even if Trypho and the dialogue are fictional, are they realistic? Increasingly the consensus is that they are, that Justin was well-informed about Judaism, that the issues and arguments are precisely what we would have predicted, and that the voice of the author is not the only one heard.⁴⁹

Justin utilized Gen 18-19 in his *Dialogue with Trypho*⁵⁰ and did so as early proof of the Christian doctrine of

⁴⁶ Marc Bregman, “משנה כמסטיירין,” in Zussman and Rosenthal, eds., מחקרי תלמוד (Hebrew Univ., 2005), 3.108-9.

⁴⁷ Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages* (Magnes Press, 1979), p. 305.

⁴⁸ All quotes from the Church Fathers are taken from: *The Ante-Nicean, Nicean, and Post-Nicean Fathers*, 38 vols. (Eerdmans, 1974) – searched and retrieved via Accordance Bible Software.

⁴⁹ Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers* (Fortress, 1995), p. 260.

⁵⁰ On Justin’s use of Gen 18 in his *Dialogue*, see Jeffrey S. Siker, *Disinheriting the Jews* (Westminster/John Knox, 1991),

the Trinity, but primarily to show that the Scriptures of the Torah taught the appearance of God incarnate.

Chapter LVI. — God Who Appeared to Moses is Distinguished from God the Father.

“Moses, then, the blessed and faithful servant of God, declares that He who appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre is God, sent with the two angels in His company to judge Sodom by Another who remains ever in the supercelestial places, invisible to all men, holding personal intercourse with none, whom we believe to be Maker and Father of all things; for he speaks thus: ‘God appeared to him under the oak in Mamre, as he sat at his tent-door at noontide. And lifting up his eyes, he saw, and behold, three men stood before him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the door of his tent; and he bowed himself toward the ground, and said;’” (etc.) “‘Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward the adjacent country, and beheld, and, lo, a flame went up from the earth, like the smoke of a furnace.’” And when I had made an end of quoting these words, I asked them if they had understood them. And they said they had understood them, but that the passages adduced brought forward no proof that there is any other God or Lord, or that the Holy Spirit says so, besides the Maker of all things.

Then I replied, “I shall attempt to persuade you, since you have understood the Scriptures, [of the truth] of what I say, that there is, and that there is said to be, another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them.” And quoting once more the previous passage, I asked Trypho, “Do you think that God appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre, as the Scripture asserts?” He said, “Assuredly.” “Was He one of those three,” I said, “whom Abraham saw, and whom the Holy Spirit of prophecy describes as men?” He said, “No; but God appeared to him, before the vision of the three. Then those three whom the Scripture calls men, were angels; two of them sent to destroy Sodom, and one to announce the joyful tidings to Sarah, that she would bear a son; for which cause he was sent, and having accomplished his errand, went away.” (*Chapter LVI*)

It appears that Justin’s Trypho is acquainted with the argument found in *Midrash Rabbah Genesis* 50.2, in which the “three men” are interpreted to be three angels: Michael, Gabriel, and Rafael. In the midrash, Michael announced his tidings to Abraham and departed: Gabriel was sent to overturn Sodom, and Rafael to rescue Lot.

Further on in this same chapter of the *Dialogue*, Trypho asks Justin to prove that one of the three men/angels is God and is distinct from “the Maker of all things,” i.e., in Christian theology, distinct from the Father. So Justin replies:

“You are aware, then, that the Scripture says, ‘And the Lord said to Abraham, Why did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I truly conceive? for I am old. Is anything impossible with God? At the time appointed shall I return to you according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.’ And after a little interval: ‘And the men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah; and Abraham went with them, to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, I will not conceal from Abraham, my servant, what I do.’ And again, after a little, it thus says: ‘The Lord said, The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and their sins are very grievous. I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to their cry which has come unto me; and if not, that I may know. And the men turned away thence, and went to Sodom. But Abraham was standing before the Lord; and Abraham drew near, and said, Will You destroy the righteous with the wicked?’ (etc.)” “And now have you not perceived, my friends, that one of the three, who is both God and Lord, and ministers to Him who is in the heavens, is Lord of the two angels? For when [the angels] proceeded to Sodom, He remained behind, and communed with Abraham in the words recorded by

Moses; and when He departed after the conversation, Abraham went back to his place. And when he came [to Sodom], the two angels no longer conversed with Lot, but Himself, as the Scripture makes evident; and He is the Lord who received commission from the Lord who [remains] in the heavens, i.e., the Maker of all things, to inflict upon Sodom and Gomorrah the [judgments] which the Scripture describes in these terms: ‘The Lord rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.’”

In summary, a number of times in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin appeals to Gen 18 and 19 as proof that the Son of God, the Christ, appeared to Abraham in bodily form, therefore proving that the Son is distinct from the Father. Thus, both Abraham and Lot called Him LORD having recognized His divine nature by the fact that He did what only God could do.

Ireneaus (150–202 CE) – Against Heresies

Chapter VII.4 – Therefore have the Jews departed from God, in not receiving His Word, but imagining that they could know the Father [apart] by Himself, without the Word, that is, without the Son; they being ignorant of that God who spake in human shape to Abraham (Gen 18:1) and again to Moses, saying, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people in Egypt, and I have come down to deliver them.” (Ex 3:7-8) For the Son, who is the Word of God, arranged these things beforehand from the beginning, the Father being in no want of angels, in order that He might call the creation into being, and form man, for whom also the creation was made; nor, again, standing in need of any instrumentality for the framing of created things, or for the ordering of those things which had reference to man; while, [at the same time,] He has a vast and unspeakable number of servants. For His offspring and His similitude do minister to Him in every respect; that is, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Word and Wisdom; whom all the angels serve, and to whom they are subject. Vain, therefore, are those who, because of that declaration, “No man knoweth the Father, but the Son,” (Matt 11:27) do introduce another unknown Father.

Chapter X.1 – 1. Wherefore also John does appropriately relate that the Lord said to the Jews: “You search the Scriptures, in which you think you have eternal life; these are they which testify of me. And you are not willing to come unto Me, that you may have life.” (Jn 5:39–40) How therefore did the Scriptures testify of Him, unless they were from one and the same Father, instructing men beforehand as to the advent of His Son, and foretelling the salvation brought in by Him?” For if you had believed Moses, you would also have believed Me; for he wrote of Me;” (Jn 5:46) [saying this,] no doubt, because the Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout his writings: at one time, indeed, speaking with Abraham, when about to eat with him; at another time with Noah, giving to him the dimensions [of the ark]; at another; inquiring after Adam; at another, bringing down judgment upon the Sodomites; and again, when He becomes visible,⁵¹ and directs Jacob on his journey, and speaks with Moses from the bush.

The apologetic of Ireneaus likewise includes reference to Gen 18-19 as one of the key texts of Scripture used to prove that the “Son of God” appeared to Abraham in human form, speaking and eating with him.

⁵¹ See Gen. 18:13 and 31:11, etc. There is an allusion here to a favorite notion among the Fathers, derived from Philo the Jew, that the name Israel was compounded from the three Hebrew words אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, i.e., “the man seeing God.”

Clement of Alexandria (155–220 CE), Stromata, Bk II, Chapter XI

Reason, the governing principle, remaining unmoved and guiding the soul, is called its pilot. For access to the Immutable is obtained by a truly immutable means. Thus Abraham was stationed before the Lord, and approaching spoke.

Eusebius (260–340 CE) – Ecclesiastical History

Book I, Chapter 2 – 7. But he [Son of God], by no means neglectful of the reverence due to the Father, was appointed to teach the knowledge of the Father to them all. For instance, the Lord God, it is said, appeared as a common man to Abraham while he was sitting at the oak of Mamre. And he, immediately falling down, although he saw a man with his eyes, nevertheless worshiped him as God, and sacrificed to him as Lord, and confessed that he was not ignorant of his identity when he uttered the words, “Lord, the judge of all the earth, will you not execute righteous judgment?”

8. For if it is unreasonable to suppose that the unbegotten and immutable essence of the almighty God was changed into the form of man or that it deceived the eyes of the beholders with the appearance of some created thing, and if it is unreasonable to suppose, on the other hand, that the Scripture should falsely invent such things, when the God and Lord who judges all the earth and executeth judgment is seen in the form of a man, who else can be called, if it be not lawful to call him the first cause of all things, than his only pre-existent Word? Concerning whom it is said in the Psalms, “He sent his Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.”

Book I, Chapter 4 – 13. It is permissible to understand this as fulfilled in us. For he [Abraham], having renounced the superstition of his fathers, and the former error of his life, and having confessed the one God over all, and having worshiped him with deeds of virtue, and not with the service of the law which was afterward given by Moses, was justified by faith in Christ, the Word of God, who appeared unto him. To him, then, who was a man of this character, it was said that all the tribes and all the nations of the earth should be blessed in him.

Cyril of Jerusalem (310–86 CE)

Lecture XIII – 6. Was it without reason that Christ was made Man? Are our teachings ingenious phrases and human subtleties? Are not the Holy Scriptures our salvation? Are not the predictions of the Prophets? Keep then, I pray you, this deposit undisturbed, and let none remove you: believe that God became Man. But though it has been proved possible for Him to be made Man, yet if the Jews still disbelieve, let us hold this forth to them: What strange thing do we announce in saying that God was made Man, when yourselves say that Abraham received the Lord as a guest? What strange thing do we announce, when Jacob says, For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved? The Lord, who ate with Abraham, ate also with us.

Hilary of Poitiers (315–67 CE)

On the Councils or the Faith of the Easterns

XIV. “If any man says that the Son did not appear to Abraham, but the Unborn God, or a part of Him: let him be anathema.

On the Trinity

Book IV. 28. Lest you fall into the error of supposing that this acknowledgment of the One was a payment of honor to all the three whom Abraham saw in company, mark the words of Lot when he saw the two who

had departed; And when Lot saw them, he rose up to meet them, and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; and he said, Behold, my lords, turn in to your servant's house. Here the plural lords shows that this was nothing more than a vision of angels; in the other case the faithful patriarch pays the honour due to One only. Thus the sacred narrative makes it clear that two of the three were mere angels; it had previously proclaimed the One as Lord and God by the words, And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I then bear a child? But I am grown old. Is anything from God impossible? At this season I will return to thee hereafter, and Sarah shall have a son. The Scripture is accurate and consistent; we detect no such confusion as the plural used of the One God and Lord, no Divine honours paid to the two angels. Lot, no doubt, calls them lords, while the Scripture calls them angels. The one is human reverence, the other literal truth.

Jerome (342–420 CE) – Letter CXXII to Rusticus

Yet, as if to make up for the loss of a single woman, Lot's glowing faith set free the whole city of Zoar. In fact when he left the dark valleys in which Sodom lay and came to the mountains, the sun rose upon him as he entered Zoar or the little City; so-called because the little faith that Lot possessed, though unable to save greater places, was at least able to preserve smaller ones. For one who had gone so far astray as to live in Gomorrah could not all at once reach the noonland where Abraham, the friend of God, entertained God and His angels.

Leo I (d. 461) – Letter XXXI To Pulcheria Augusta

No doubt the Almighty Son of God could have appeared for the purpose of teaching, and justifying men in exactly the same way that He appeared both to patriarchs and prophets in the semblance of flesh; for instance, when He engaged in a struggle, and entered into conversation [with Jacob], or when He refused not hospitable entertainment, and even partook of the food set before Him [Gen 18]. But these appearances were indications of that Man whose reality it was announced by mystic predictions would be assumed from the stock of preceding patriarchs. And the fulfilment of the mystery of our atonement, which was ordained from all eternity, was not assisted by any figures because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon the Virgin, and the power of the Most High had not over-shadowed her: so that "Wisdom building herself a house" [Prov 9:1] within her undefiled body, "the Word became flesh;" and the form of God and the form of a slave coming together into one person, the Creator of times was born in time; and He Himself through whom all things were made, was brought forth in the midst of all things.

Summary and Conclusion

It is clear that during the period of the 2nd through the 5th centuries, the polemical use of Gen 18-19, containing as it does the appearance of YHVH to Abraham, was used as one of the standard arguments by the Church Fathers to prove the fundamental Christian doctrine of God's incarnation in Christ and thus to substantiate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The debates over these issues which ensued within the Christian Church itself required the Church Fathers to give all that much more attention to providing theological arguments for what would eventually be canonized as doctrine by the Church councils. Further, while scholars debate over the intended audience for Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, it seems warranted to allow the very real possibility that it was written both to Christians (whether Gentiles or Jews) as well as to evangelize Jews with the Christian message. Having given examples from the *Dialogue* which would indicate an approach to Jewish and Gentile Christians as well as to non-Christians Jews, Wilson writes:

If we are guided by these passages and by the general content of the *Dialogue*, which is relevant to both situations, it is difficult to differentiate between the aim of shoring up Christian convictions in the face of Jewish propaganda and confronting the Jews with the Christian message with a view to conversion. That Trypho is politely noncommittal at the end may point to the former rather than the latter purpose even if it

does not signal that all attempts to convert the Jews will inevitably be in vain.⁵²

Given the history of conflict between emerging Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity after 70 CE, it seems very probable that the use of Gen 18-19 by the Church fathers in the following centuries could have evoked a rabbinic response aimed not only to defeat the Christian interpretation and application of Gen 18–19 as proof of God incarnate but even more importantly, to give the synagogue communities a ready answer when confronted by Christians.

The extant textual evidence strongly suggests that the *tiqqun sopherim* in Gen 18:22 is not based upon a historical variant in the text itself but was formulated in order to support a midrashic interpretation of the text. McCarthy, after concluding that the *tiqqun sopherim* of Gen 18:22 was not text-based but was the result of rabbinic midrash, offers this scenario to suggest what may have been the impetus for constructing the *tiqqun* in this text:

The following line of reasoning seeks to show that if one could assume that Simeon himself actually connected his logion on Gen 18:22 as recorded in Genesis Rabbah XLIX, 7 to the haggadic traditions concerning Gen 18:1 as witnessed to in Genesis Rabbah XLVII, 1 and 7 ... then one might have a clue to at least part of the origins of the tradition concerning Gen 18:22 as a scribal emendation. In other words, the suggestion being made is that it was in the light of the haggadic interpretations of Gen 18:1, where the LORD shows his condescension by standing while Abraham sat, coupled with the obvious difficulty encountered by the actual form of v. 22, that the inspiration for the interpretation of Gen 18:22 in a similar manner, and ultimately as a scribal emendation, was born.⁵³

When, however, one considers that Gen 18-19 became a standard text used by the Church Fathers of the early centuries to substantiate the Christian doctrine of an incarnate God, one has to wonder if this *tiqqun sopherim* was initially constructed as a necessary measure to counter the Christian polemic based on this text, and that the midrashic teaching regarding the “condescension of the LORD” was secondary.

As the narrative of Gen 18 unfolds, the opening verse functions as a general introduction to the events that subsequently take place in the narrative. Thus, the opening line of the pericope, וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה בְּאֵלֵי מַמְרֵא, “And YHVH appeared to him at the oaks of Mamre...” announces the activity of YHVH, both in His on-going faithfulness to fulfill His covenant promise to Abraham and to deal with the “outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah” because “their sin is exceedingly grave” (v. 20).

The faithfulness of YHVH to the covenant He has made with Abraham is highlighted when the birth of the promised son is announced (v. 14). The narrative section dealing with the retribution meted out to Sodom and Gomorrah begins in v. 16, וַיִּקְמוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁקְפוּ עַל-פְּנֵי סֹדֵם וְאַבְרָהָם הֵלֵךְ עִמָּם לְשַׁלְּחָם: “Then the men rose up from there and looked down toward Sodom; and Abraham was walking with them to send them off.” The straightforward reading of the text is that all three men who initially approached Abraham’s tent are walking toward Sodom, accompanied by Abraham. The one-sided dialog that occurs next (in vv. 17–19) would seem to be between YHVH and the other two men, for YHVH speaks in regard to Abraham but He is obviously not speaking directly to Abraham.

Next, in v. 22 we read: וַיִּפְּנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֹמָה וְאַבְרָהָם עֹדֵינוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנֵי יְהוָה: “Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham continued standing before YHVH.” When read in light of 19:1, which gives the further detail that only two of the three men/angels initially came to Sodom, the only conclusion one would reach with the text as it stands, is that the third man is YHVH Who remained with Abraham and came to Sodom only after finishing the conversation with Abraham in vv. 23–32. This is confirmed in v. 33, וַיֵּלֶךְ יְהוָה כְּאִשֶּׁר כִּלְהָ לְדַבֵּר אֶל-אַבְרָהָם וְאַבְרָהָם שָׁב לְמִקְמוֹ: “And YHVH departed when He had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.” Understanding the narrative in the sense that Abraham accompanied all three men as they walk toward Sodom, but then only two of the three continue on toward Sodom, leaves

⁵² Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers* (Fortress, 1995), p. 265.

⁵³ McCarthy, *Tiqqune Sopherim*, pp. 74–5.

the obvious impression that the third man is YHVH, as the ensuing dialog makes clear. Moreover, when the final clause of 18:22 reads: *וַאֲבִרְהֶם עֹדְנֵנוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנֵי יְהוָה*: "...while Abraham continued standing before YHVH," it describes YHVH as stationary and corporeal, which speaks against the midrashim which describe YHVH as the Shechinah. But the Shechinah is numinous, in no way corporeal, and thus omnipresent, not constrained to physicality but appearing to Abraham wherever he would go.

In conclusion, what I am suggesting, then, is the possibility that the *tiqqun sopherim* on Gen 18:22 was developed by the rabbis as a theological necessity in order to strengthen the midrashic interpretation that YHVH appeared to Abraham as the Shechinah and not as one of the three men who came to Abraham's tent. As such, the Shechinah, being numinous and having no corporeal form, could not be viewed as constrained to a given physical location, but rather is omnipresent,⁵⁴ appearing to Abraham wherever he might be. To posit an original text to have been *וַיְהוֶה עֹדְנֵנוּ עֹמֵד לְפָנֵי אֲבִרְהֶם*, "And YHVH continued standing before Abraham" allows the midrashic explanation that all three men had left Abraham, and only the Shechinah remained standing before him, thus undermining the Christian use of the text to prove that YHVH had come to Abraham as a man, an event which from the Christian viewpoint substantiated both a divine incarnation as well as a *hypostasis* within the Godhead.

⁵⁴ McCarthy also sees the Shechinah's omnipresence as an important aspect of the rabbinic view in Gen 18; cf. *Tiqqune Sopherim*, p. 70.