THE DIVINE NAME אֱלֹהִים AS A SYMBOL OF PRESENCE IN ISRAELITE TRADITION

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Introduction

THE HEBREW BIBLE employs the morpheme אֱלֹהִים fifty-five times to perform a variety of functions. For the purposes of this paper, the nineteen times אֱלֹהִים serves as the verb of a subject other than Yahweh may be dismissed. But even when Yahweh is the obvious speaker or actor in the context, a variety of syntactic possibilities are attested; these must occupy full attention.

The basic thesis to be advanced is simple. Whenever אֱלֹהִים appears in a context of divine action or promise, its theological significance as a symbol of divine presence far exceeds its simple syntactic function as a first person singular verbal form.

The traditio-historical reasons for this widely attested symbolic function are certainly to be sought originally in the importance attached to the divine name אֱלֹהִים by the foundational JE call and commission of Moses narrative located in Exod 3:1-4:17, which doubtless provides one of the bases for the prophetic understanding of divine presence in subsequent eras and further serves as a model for several later call narratives. The theological significance of this understanding relates to a major fear with which Israel had

1. See the extended examination of the biblical "call" narratives in Habel (1965). Note also the discussion by Holladay (1960), and see further below, especially with reference to the Gideon passage.
always been at pains to wrestle, namely the concern that the God who had been present with Moses and Joshua might in his sovereignty abandon Israel.\(^2\) That is to say, the prophetic usage of אֲלָהֵי always places it in the context of a situation wherein the presence (or absence) of God is of the utmost significance theologically.\(^3\)

I. אֲלָהֵי as a Divine Name

It is necessary to establish from the beginning the fact that both in biblical and in post-biblical traditions, אֲלָהֵי is used as a proper noun, essentially as an allomorph of the more common form יהוה. Clearly the starting point for this understanding must be Exod 3:14, where it has long been recognized that the phrase אֲלָהֵי is the precise equivalent of יהוה שלוהי.\(^4\)

A second example of אֲלָהֵי used as a divine name is found in Ps 50:21. Professor Ronald Youngblood (1972) has shown that אֲלָהֵי in this verse functions exactly as it does in Exod 3:14.\(^5\) Because Psalm 50 is an ‘Elohim’ psalm, it is not surprising that the divine name (or title) אֲלָהֵי occurs in it a total of nine times (vv. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 [twice], 14, 16, 23). But five other divine names or titles also occur, including (1) יהוה and (2) יהוה in v. 1, as part of the fuller sequence אֲלָהֵי יהוה which is attested elsewhere only in Josh 22:22; (3) הוֹוֵד in v. 6; (4) יעלֵית in v. 14, parallel to אלוהים; (5) אלהים in v. 22. אֲלָהֵי is thus one of a total of seven [*] divine names contained in Psalm 50.

Grammatically, although v. 21 as a whole exhibits some difficulties, the particular phrase in which אֲלָהֵי occurs may be read quite simply. אלהֵי These things you have done and I remained silent; [accordingly] you thought אֲלָהֵי was like you are.\(^6\)

A third example attesting אֲלָהֵי used as an allomorph of יהוה is located in the famous phrase in Hos 1:9, the theological significance of which will be discussed in more detail below. But syntactically, H. W. Wolff has demon-

2. Brueggeman (1976, pp. 680–683) has a particularly useful discussion of this concept. See also the excellent bibliography which he has compiled at the end of the article.

3. See further Coats (1972, pp. 77–85).

4. I have discussed the full אֲלָהֵי formula in another article (1978).

5. Youngblood concluded that only Exod 3:14, Ps 50:21, and Hos 1:9 attest אֲלָהֵי as a proper name in the Hebrew Bible. However, see further below, including some of Youngblood’s own comments.

6. This reading has the added advantage of preserving the Massoretic Text, as Youngblood has correctly noted (1972, p. 146), rather than requiring an emendation to hayyot with Dahood (1974, 1:310) and most modern commentators.
strated beyond question the nominal function of אָלַי here. The argument bears repeating at length.

Verse 9b is composed of two strictly parallel nominal clauses. The last four words are comprehensible only when thus interpreted: "I am not" (יוֹדֵא אָלַי; note the maqqeph) functions as a predicate noun, thus standing parallel to "not my people" (יְהוָה אֵל). This makes sense, however, only if אָלַי is used as in Ex 3:14 and replaces the name of Yahweh. Thus "for you" (לְכָל) replaces the corresponding nominal suffix in יְהוָה אֵל. Thus the meaning of the sentence is: "You are not my people and I am not your אָלַי."

In addition to these three obvious and undeniable examples of the nominal function of אָלַי, a fourth text may be considered which, despite the interpretation it is usually given, would appear to attest also the function for אָלַי which has been demonstrated already from Exodus, Hosea, and Psalm 50. The well-known Nathan oracle to David about the building of the Temple in Jerusalem begins with Yahweh reminding David through the prophet that he had little need for a manmade, permanent "house": "I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the sons of Israel up from Egypt down to this very day" (2 Sam 7:6). Then follows in the same verse the phrase, אָלַי אֲנַחַי יְהוָה מַהֲלָלֵל בָּאֲהֻלׁוּ לְבַפְּסָכֹן which is generally translated something like, "but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling" (RSV). Such a rendition is obviously founded upon the supposition of S. R. Driver (1913, p. 274) that יְהוָה מַהֲלָלֵל expresses forcibly the idea of continuance [emphasis added]. However, there is another possibility which is at least equally feasible grammatically. One might view אָלַי not as a paraphrastic but instead interpret אָלַי to be a proper noun which functions as the subject of the expressed verb מַהֲלָלֵל. The translation of the entire phrase would then be, "but אָלַי traveled in a tent and a tabernacle." Two additional reasons point to the plausibility of such a choice. First, the form אָלַי occurs elsewhere with Yahweh as its subject, notably in Gen 3:8 and Deut 23:15. Second, the form אָלַי is available to express a narrative past tense and would normally be chosen in precisely such a context.

7. A fact noted as well by several others. See Youngblood (1972, p. 148, note 7) for details.
9. 1 Chr 17:5 seems to make a different judgment, "correcting" 2 Sam 7:6 to יְהוָה מַהֲלָלֵל אֲנַחַי, which obviously demands an additional הָלָל as often noted, and just as obviously producing a text no clearer than the one it rephrases.
10. Of the nine texts which attest אָלַי (2 Sam 7:6, 9; 22:24; Hos 11:4; Ps 102:8; Prov 8:30;
To these four examples, a fifth possibility must be added. One of the most common uses of אֲלֵיָּהּ in the Hebrew Bible is attested in the phrase אֲלֵיָּהּ עַלךְ מִכְּלָל, the theological function of which will be discussed below. At this point, however, it is necessary to establish the grammatical and syntactic boundaries within which a proper translation of אֲלֵיָּהּ עַלךְ מִכְּלָל may be considered permissible.

Five variations of the basic form are attested in the eleven total occurrences of the phrase.

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Before proposing a suggestion for the אֲלֵיָּהּ עַלךְ מִכְּלָל phrase, an examination of some parallel phrases which employ אֲלֵיָּהּ in place of אֲלֵיָּהּ is in order. In Josh 1:5, the sentence כָּל אֲלֵיָּהּ עַלךְ מִכְּלָל includes tense indicators which are built in both morphologically and contextually. The presence of Yahweh with Moses in the past was to be the pattern of his comparable presence with Joshua in the future; the perfect and imperfect forms of אֲלֵיָּהּ serve acceptably to indicate this pattern. But with this phrase which contains אֲלֵיָּהּ, Josh 1:9 must be compared: 'This whole nation will be with you.' This sentence also is concerned with the future, as both the context and the imperfect form of אֲלֵיָּהּ indicate. Consequently, even lacking an expressed copula (אָלָּה), the phrase כָּל אֲלֵיָּהּ עַלךְ מִכְּלָל must surely be understood as, 'Yahweh your God will be with you,' because the focus of the entire passage is futuristic. And this should show that no verbal form of any kind is absolutely necessary in such phrases merely to indicate future time. Rather, כָּל אֲלֵיָּהּ is simply a shorter and contextually nuanced way of expressing the same idea implied by the phrase כָּל אֲלֵיָּהּ מִכְּלָל. Significantly, precisely this latter expression is used in Josh 1:17, while 1 Sam 17:37 employs the comparable יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה עַלךְ מִכְּלָל.

In the light of such information, it should not be thought unreasonable to propose that the specific אֲלֵיָּהּ עַלךְ מִכְּלָל form itself often attests the grapheme אֲלֵיָּהּ. Job 7:20; 1 Chr 17:5, 8), only the verses in Psalms, Proverbs, and Job may not be interpreted as a possible nominal function for אֲלֵיָּהּ. The apocapated (jussive) form אֲלֵיָּהּ is attested twelve times (Judg 18:4; Ezek 11:16; Hos 13:7; Pss 18:24 [= 2 Sam 22:24]; 38:15; 69:12; 73:14; Job 30:9; Neh 1:4; 2:11, 13, 15). A comparable situation statistically is represented by the occurrence of אֲלוֹרָא.twenty times (plus the Kethib in Josh 7:21) alongside the apocapated form אֲלוֹרָא which occurs fifteen times. In addition, the full form אֶלֶּה is attested four times (1 Kgs 16:25; 2 Kgs 3:2; 13:11; Ezek 18:19), despite the fact that the apocapated form אֲלֹהֵי occurs more than 200 times. In short, though both forms are attested in several cases, the weight of the evidence would seem to favor the use of an apocapated form of the III Y verbs with Waw-conversive in narrative.
as an allomorph of יְהֹוָה. For if יְחֵי in this form is not necessary merely as a tense marker (although it undeniably may be that also), another function should be considered for it. What is that function? Why is יְחֵי used at all in this form if the future tense is already apparent from the context as a whole? Surely the answer is to be found in the nominal function of יְחֵי, which had been viewed as a symbol of divine presence since the days of Moses and before. Surely too the symbolic nature of יְחֵי would allow, on the basis of this understanding as well as the syntactically parallel יְחֵי (2 Sam 7:3), that יְחֵי might fairly be rendered, יְהֹוָה will be with you,” or when the pronoun יְחֵי is used, יְהֹוָה, will be with you” (Deut 31:23) / “with your mouth” (Exod 4:12, 15). Again, the English future tense derives from the context exhibited by the total passage exactly as is the case in Josh 1:9.

Still, it is obvious that the argument in favor of translating יְחֵי as יְהֹוָה will be with you,” is quite unconvincing apart from the acknowledgment that יְחֵי actually is used by certain biblical authors as a divine name. That is, only if יְחֵי can be shown to function as a proper noun can the phrase יְחֵי be used to illuminate one’s understanding of יְהֹוָה. Surely Exod 3:14, Ps 50:21, Hos 1:9, and perhaps even 2 Sam 7:6 cumulatively provide adequate basis for the possibility of such an acknowledgment.

Before this section of the paper on the nominal function of יְחֵי is concluded, it should be noted that post-biblical traditions of various kinds also preserve the memory of יְחֵי used as a divine name. For example, the Septuagint witness to Hos 1:9 includes two significant features which signal the fact that the translators of that version were aware of the way in which יְחֵי functioned in the verse. These features are (1) the use of the possessive όντων to modify Εὐμαχ (יְחֵי); (2) the capitalization of Εὐμαχ, which Wolff (1974, pp. 21–22, note 151) has observed, “is used in all the minuscules for personal nouns.’’

In addition to this Septuagint witness, there is abundant evidence from the Targumim that numerous post-biblical Jewish authorities perceived the nominal force of יְחֵי clearly also.

II. The Function of the יְחֵי Form

In each of the יְחֵי phrases discussed above, four things are characteristic. First, Yahweh is always the subject/speaker. Second, the tense/
temporal implications are for the immediate future. Third, each promise is phrased in the grammatical singular, i.e., personally expressed promissorily by Yahweh to one particular individual. Fourth, the purpose of this divine promise in each case was to alleviate fear and to remove doubts about the adequacy of human resources for accomplishing the tasks which lay immediately in the future.

Exod 3:12 is fairly typical among the examples of this type, and it clearly exhibits each of the characteristic points just noted. That Yahweh is the speaker of the promise in Exodus 3 is clear from 3:4 and 3:7, both of which specifically involve Yahweh in the episode even though the subsequent dialogue through 3:14 appears to be between Moses and Elohim. Further, the immediacy of the future assertions being made in the passage is also readily apparent, as is the emphasis upon divine rather than mere human adequacy to accomplish successfully the task at hand. These facts are apparent from a look at the entire literary unit of the Moses call and commission narrative, Exod 3:1–4:17. From v. 3:6 forward, God and Moses speak back and forth to each other quite bluntly in the grammatical first person. The speeches of God are characterized by several different features, not the least important of which is the shifting of tenses from present to past to future as the conversation develops.

At the outset of the dialogue, Yahweh identifies himself as the “god of the fathers” (3:6), employing the present tense which is the channel for contact between God and man. Then he reports to Moses in the past tense the fact that he has become aware of the sorry plight of Israel in Egypt, using specific words to recall the terminology of Exod 2:24–25: "לֹא ה' וַעֲלָמָיו" (3:8). It is only following these present and past tense assertions from Yahweh that the text introduces the future or promissory element into the narrative. “I will send you” (3:10), and, in a direct response to the all too human reticence of Moses to accept such a difficult assignment, the words which promise divine presence and further imply divine sufficiency, (כִּי אַחֲרֵי עָמְךָ) (3:12).

Quite a similar situation is attested in Judges 6. At the beginning of the dialogue in this narrative, this time between the divinity and Gideon, the greets Gideon with the words, "יְהוָה בּוֹאֶת בָּדֶד הָיוָל, יְהוָה בּוֹאֶת בָּדֶד הָיוָל" (6:12). This particular address must be viewed as bordering upon the cynical or at least the ironical in light of the circumstances.

12. On the composite nature of the unit, see Childs (1974, pp. 52–53).
So the appropriate rejoinder of Gideon to such a greeting includes two unanswerable (in his thinking at least) queries. "If Yahweh is (יְהֹウェָה) with us, why has all this befallen us, and where are all his (God's) miracles which our fathers have recounted to us?" (6:13). And without bothering to wait for the messenger to speak, Gideon proceeded to draw his own conclusions, which to anyone aware of the facts must have appeared self evident. "But now, Yahweh has forsaken us" (6:13). The "now" of Gideon is thus placed in sharp contrast to the "then" about which the fathers loved to talk. "Then" there had been presence, "now" only absence.

The speech of Yahweh (not merely the "messenger"!) in v. 14 appears to be specifically designed and worded for the purpose of bridging that gap between the "then" of the Exodus miracles and the "now" of the Midianite oppression. It includes a promise for deliverance from the power (יִהוֹ) of Midian, and, in a phrase which is strongly reminiscent of Exod 3:14, a reminder from Yahweh to the reluctant Gideon in the first person, "Have I not sent you?" (ךָוקִי לְךָ הַלְוַדֵּעֵל). whereupon Gideon follows the example of Moses, the objector par excellence, with a strongly worded objection of his own. "How could I deliver Israel? Look, my family is the weakling (בֹּדֵי) of Manasseh, and I am the youngest one (בֹּדֵי) in the household of my father." (6:15).

At this juncture, as a conclusion to the first part of the dialogue with Gideon, Yahweh gives a divine rejoinder which once again calls upon the phraseology of the Moses commission: הַלְוַדֵּעֵל אֲדֹתֵא אָבִי (6:16). Yahweh as the speaker, the awful immediacy of the task facing Gideon, and sharp focus upon the single fearful individual who is to be made adequate by the presence of God are all apparent in this dialogue, even as they are in the Moses call passage.

The situation involving all of the other examples is similar to what has been noted with respect to Moses and Gideon, although there are indeed minor differences as well. But Isaac and Jacob are promised divine presence to accompany them upon a journey which is immediately to be begun (Gen 26:3; 31:3). Joshua was preparing to lead the people upon a journey into the land of promise (Josh 1:5; 3:7). David was facing an immediate future which included not only his death but also the need to make certain that a son would reign in his stead (2 Sam 7:9; 1 Chr 17:8). In short, each man was facing some great uncertain and frightening moment just around the bend. Clearly the promise given by Yahweh was intended to furnish the courage and strength which were necessary to accomplish each one of these special assignments.

13. As H. D. Preuss has shown (1969, pp. 139–173). But Preuss has pressed beyond the evidence in asserting that the original Sitz of the "Mitsein" formula was a nomadic society in which journeys of various lengths and duration were frequent.
looming in the immediate future. And just as clearly, the promise was designed to function encouragingly and reassuringly in these contexts of uncertainty and fear.

III. המָרַך in Hosea 1:9

מָרַך is used a total of three times in the book of Hosea. 1:9, examined syntactically above, attests a theological function for המָרַך which is quite widely recognized to be both dependent upon Exodus 3 and an attempt to express the negation of what had been affirmed positively by the earlier passage. In the appropriate words of Professor Wolff again (1974, p. 21), "this answer picks up the vocabulary of the narrative in Ex 3f, but, in antithesis to the covenant formula there (cf. Ex 6:7), it here is a formula of divorce." Wolff is certainly correct on the point, and there can be little reason to doubt that his understanding should be reflected in any attempt to interpret Hos 1:9. Beyond that, however, it would appear that the unquestionable nominal function of המָרַך in Hos 1:9 makes it necessary to raise the issue of the relationship between Hosea and the Deuteronomic History, specifically with regard to the use of המָרַך. That there are numerous points of similarity and dependence between the books of Hosea and Deuteronomy, no one doubts. What needs to be examined is the rather facile assumption of Wolff, which is largely followed by other scholars, that "entire complexes of thought characteristic of Deuteronomic paraenesis occur first [emphasis added] in

14. David would know the presence of God in not being allowed to build the Temple himself! But the point still stands.

15. The other occurrences of המָרַך in Hosea are 11:4 and 14:6. Contrary to the setting of the usage in 1:9, the abundance of first person verbal forms in both of these contexts dictates that המָרַך should be allowed to function verbally. However, it is also quite possible that המָרַך might be performing double duty in both 11:4 and 14:6. Though in neither instance is there any kind of introductory formula, and though the speaker of the sentences framed in the first person is never identified specifically, there can be little mystery about who the speaker is. That is just the point. המָרַך is used as a noun precisely in first person speeches made by Yahweh, as all the previous examples show. Whenever המָרַך is to be understood as having the nominal function, Yahweh is the only proper one so to use it. Accordingly, though I do not wish to press the point, I would incline towards translating Hos 11:4 as, "הָרַךְ will be to them as are those who lift a small child to their cheek" [on the textual difficulties of the verse see Wolff (1974, p. 191)]. Hos 14:6 could also be, "הָרַךְ will be as dew to Israel." Again, when God is referring to himself, המָרַך is an appropriate word, and a word which Hos 1:9 reveals was part of the active vocabulary of the prophet.

16. There is a good discussion of the relationship between Deuteronomy and Hosea in Brueggeman (1960, pp. 43–50). Professor Pierce Matheny called this reference to my attention.
Hosea." But is it not equally possible that at least some of the material
which is common to Hosea and Deuteronomy occurs first in the living
Deuteronomic tradition, and that Hosea was responding to and influenced in
his ministry by various theological opinions of which he had become aware
from such a source? Walter Brueggeman (1968, p. 43) has expressed a view
of the relationship between Hosea and Deuteronomy which accounts for the
evidence in a more acceptable fashion.

I do not refer to literary dependence but rather to the appropriation of a living
tradition which received its literary expression [later] in Deuteronomy. This
relation is important for understanding the context out of which the proclama-
tion of Hosea emerged. It links Hosea to the Northern tradition of amphi-
tyony. We do not have a man copying a document but a member of the
community drawing perceptively and creatively upon the traditions of the
community.

A few pages later in the same work (1968, p. 50), Brueggeman deftly sum-
marizes the heart of the matter when he asserts that Hosea "has fully entered
into and has learned much from the tradition of Deuteronomy."

Part of what should be stressed about the specific function of the word
ין in this regard is the fact that Hosea must have been aware of the symbolic
significance of the term as an allomorph of יתנ not only through his demon-
strated acquaintance with Israel's early epic traditions, but also through the
channel which may be identified as the precursors of the Deuteronomic
school. In other words, not only must Hos 1:9 be viewed as a parting shot in
the discussion about early covenantal traditions as Wolff has suggested, it is
also the expression of the coming to actuality of that grimmest of all pos-
sibilities which Israel could ever have conceived, the end of the era of divine
presence.

With respect to the Deuteronomic tradition specifically, a theological
understanding of divine presence vs. absence was expressed to the house of
David in simplistic terms. Evidence of the presence of Yahweh with the king
and the nation was manifestly the continuance of the line of David upon the
throne and in Jerusalem. However, if Davidic and national permanency for

17. See Wolff (1974, p. xxxi) and notice the process of composition which he postulates for
the entire book. See also Nicholson (1967, p. 70) on the subject of the dependence of Hosea upon
Deuteronomy and not vice versa.

18. Wolff (1974, p. 22) asserts that Hos 1:9 shows the concern of the prophet, "with the
oldest premonarchic traditions of Yahwism." I believe there is a great deal more involved.
Judah implied, yea even presupposed, presence, surely a catastrophic end for Israel implied absence (נלא). In short, Hosea’s word to the Northern Kingdom, soon to be demolished, was interpretative as well as simply judgmental. He was addressing the ultimate meaning of the loss of land and nationhood, a loss which he understood to mean tragically that God was no longer present in Israel as he once (always) had been in the past. Or, said another way, that אלוהים no longer chose to be God to Israel and no longer wished to choose Israel to be people to him was to be deduced from the fact that he would refuse to defend her or protect her from an awful rape by the Assyrians as he had always defended his people from enemies in the past.

Rudolph Smend has argued that Hos 1:9 is not to be understood as the last word which the prophet spoke concerning the covenantal relationship between God and people. Smend (1963, p. 25) points instead to Hos 2:25, where, "Jahwe verheisst, dass er das Nein wieder in ein Ja verwandeln wird." This judgment of Hos 2:25 is certainly correct.19 But that does not change the basic meaning of Hos 1:9, at least at the time of its pronouncement by the prophet. At that one moment, if never again, Hosea employed אלוהים in a chilling way to assert that God had abandoned Israel.20 "The mark of a live symbol is its ability to carry a message on a non-verbal emotional level" (Meyers, 1976, p. 134) which is even greater in impact than ordinary words could be. אלוהים was a major symbol of divine presence in the traditions of which Hosea was keenly aware, both the ancient epic traditions and the (for him) current Deuteronomic ones. Clearly the prophet could not have chosen a more emotional term by which to express the ‘‘Nein’’ of God to his people.

IV. Die Bundesformel21

A second common function of אלוהים is associated with the phrase אני אלוהים ישראל/עמלת/אלהים/לאלהים which, like אני אחר/אני אֱלֹהִים, occurs a total of eleven times in the Hebrew Bible, five times each in Jeremiah and Ezekiel and once in Zech 8:8:

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19. For example, see Brueggeman (1977, p. 146) on the turnabout from chapter one to chapter two in Hosea.
21. This is the title of the important work by Smend (1963). Smend uses the term Bundesformel to describe all of the ‘‘Yahweh God of Israel, Israel people of God’’ forms found in the Hebrew Bible. In this paper, I am using the term only with reference to those passages which employ אני.
Two of these eleven examples of the Bundesformel are atypical. Both Jer 31:1 and Ezek 34:24 lack the opening phrase which normally introduces the Bundesformel proper, יְהֹוָה/היָהּ יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים. Further, Ezek 34:24 attests יְהֹוָה יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים and יְהֹוָה יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים juxtaposed, יְהֹוָה יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים. This is a rather uncommon phrasing which may imply nothing more than that יְהֹוָה יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים is an explanatory gloss for nominal יְהֹוָה יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים. But apart from these two exceptional examples, the Bundesformel with יְהֹוָה יִשְׁתַּחֲמוּ לְעֹשֵׂה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים is attested only in the two variants listed above, each of which is a basically simple sentence, the only difference being that one is second person and the other third person (both plural).

By comparison with the Bundesformel proper, these Bundesformele exhibit (1) Yahweh as subject/speaker; (2) a plural addressee ("you"/"they"); (3) focus upon a non-immediate future; (4) emphasis upon a covenantal relationship which is in need of reconstitution or at least of reinstatement. The primary idea expressed by the context in each case where the Bundesformel is employed is the hope that present conditions of disobedience (=covenant non-compliance) will be met in such a way as to make it possible for the original relationship between people and deity to be restored. These conditions include those which Yahweh will meet as well as those which the people must meet, and are expressed by a variety of words and key phrases which occur repeatedly in the context of the Bundesformel proper.

Professor Thomas M. Raitt (1977, pp. 128–173) has discussed these Bundesformele in his extremely enlightening chapter on "The Prophetic Oracle of Deliverance." There are specifically three topics under which Raitt has organized the deliverance oracles: deliverance, transformation, and relationship. For purposes of this discussion, it may be useful to select seven concepts which are found within the context of the oracle of deliverance which consistently provides the setting for the Bundesformel.

1. Observance יָשַׁלְשָׁל יְהֹוָה נַעֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים of Words, Laws, Statutes, etc.
   Jer 11:4; Ezek 11:20; 36:27; 37:24
2. People Return, Repentance [Qal שוב]
   Jer 24:7; Ezek 14:6
3. Gathering [לֶךָ/אָסַף לֶךֵי] from Many Countries
   Jer 32:37; Ezek 11:17; 36:24; 37:21
4. Divine Restoration
   A. From Babylon/Chaldea
      Jer 24:6 [השכיתים/שוב שבחו]; 30:3, 18 [השכיתים]
   B. From Many Countries
      Jer 32:37 [השכיתים]; Ezek 36:24 [הנאותי]; 37:21; Zech 8:8
5. Purification [تنظيف]
   Ezek 36:25; 37:23
6. New Spirit [רוח חדש]
   Ezek 11:19; 36:26
7. One/New Heart [לב חדש]
   Jer 32:39; Ezek 11:19; 36:26 [לב חדש]

On the basis of language alone, these *Bundesformele* are surely susceptible to a translation and interpretation which would differ from the common understanding of them in an important way. As was the case with the מָאַה form, so too in these *Bundesformele*, מָאַה is not necessary simply to indicate future time. Rather, the future aspect is carried over contextually from the first half of the sentence which precedes, as well as implied by the context of the whole. And it is also noteworthy that the future is indicated in the *Bundesformele* which happen to lack מָאַה by the use of רֹאִית and Waw-conversive (see Jer 31:33 and *passim*). Nor is מָאַה necessary to indicate the first person subject, for in every case the independent personal pronoun is employed, either יִרְאָה or יִרְאָה. In short, once again מָאַה may be viewed as functioning nominally rather than merely verbally with prefixed Aleph used to indicate the subject. Or, at the very least, it must be asserted that מָאַה in the *Bundesformel* may be nominal as well as verbal in function. Because of the expressed pronoun in each case, it is thus possible that the *Bundesformel* could be translated, “You/They will become people to me and I, מָאַה, God to you/them.” However, whether or not one should choose to translate מָאַה as a proper noun in these *Bundesformele*, its presence in the form must be interpreted so as to include the possibility of its symbolic function.

With the exception of Ezek 14:11, each of the *Bundesformele* is related to the context of exile or dispersion, the very situations in which the presence of God among his people would be called into question as never before. The

22. Rather than simply “be.” The idiom is לֹא . . . לֹא. 
great leaders of the past were long dead. The impressive symbols of nationhood and kingship as well as any semblance of material prosperity were nowhere to be found. The gap between the "now" and the "then" was even wider than Gideon had experienced. The crucial theological significance of the passages in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah which contain the Bundesformel can hardly be denied. Anxiety due to the assumption that there had been a discontinuity of relationship between people and God highlighted the necessity for a bold new prophetic word to be addressed specifically to the radically different situation. The Bundesformel is that bold new word.

To the concern about rejection there needed to be addressed a new election within the same tradition-historical framework of the Exodus under which the rejection took place. This, I feel, is especially communicated by the so-called Covenant Formula [Raitt’s translation of Bundesformel] which in these oracles takes on quite a distinctive counterbalancing import. This formulation is ... in my estimation ... the single most important and effective way of expressing a new era in the God-Israel relationship. (Raitt, 1977, p. 134)

One page later in the same book, Professor Raitt clarifies and distills this view of the significance of the Bundesformel. “I think that the real meaning of the Covenant Formula in this context is the communication of a new act of election.”

It must also be of great significance that יהוה should have been chosen so often to convey that “new act of election,” to signal the ultimate closing of that “then/now” gap, to express the idea of a restored people-God relationship. Surely the idea latent in the form would not have been forgotten in this new functional context either. What was being given in the Bundesformel was the authoritative, prophetic word that the God who had in time past been characteristically “with” his people, would once again become involved actively (or from the perspective of the people, “openly”) in their affairs, restoring, purifying, gathering, etc., and ultimately bringing

24. Smend, following Wellhausen, has even suggested that the idea of "Yahweh the God of Israel, Israel the people of Yahweh," is the principle, "von dem aus sich das ganze Alte Testament als eine Einheit sehen liess, die man aus diesem Prinzip ableiten oder, vorsichtiger, um diese Mitte gruppieren konnte" (1963, p. 3). The problem of a "Mitte" for the doing of Old Testament theology remains a hotly debated issue. Recently (1974, pp. 65–82), Hasel has argued cogently that the center must be God, though he cautions that this must be understood only in light of the "intensely dynamic nature of this center [which is] not and can never be static." (p. 81).

In a different vein, Moshe Weinfeld has argued that the Bundesformel "is taken from the sphere of marriage and adoption" (1976, p. 28, note 41). See also Weinfeld’s discussion of covenantal formulae (1970, especially p. 200).
about the conditions under which it would be possible to reaffirm the most basic of relationships.

That this prophetic interpretation of the events of Judean exile was fundamentally different from the way in which Hosea had viewed the fall of Israel in Hos 1:9 would not go unnoticed either. Hosea is “generally acknowledged as a source of direct influence on Jeremiah.”25 Certainly Jeremiah and Ezekiel both used אֲדֹנָי precisely because they wished to interpret the exile of their own people in sharp contrast to the way in which Hos 1:9 responded to the Israelite catastrophe. But there is also operative here an attempt to connect the new and radical message being preached to exiled ones with an old and honored traditional understanding of divine presence. אֲדֹנָי helps to perform this function admirably too, again, not least of all because of its high symbolic value and emotional impact. This may be observed at two levels. First, what Hosea had said negatively (אֲבֹד הָאָדָם לְעַל), Jeremiah and Ezekiel wished to say positively (אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי לְכֶם לְכָלֵּי). In other words, they wished to affirm in their era what Hosea had been compelled to deny in his. But there is a second point. The אֲדֹנָי form had bespoken a promise of divine presence and sufficiency vouchsafed to a single great leader as he faced an impending moment of crisis. But אֲדֹנָי used in the new context was intended to convey much more than that, for in the Bundesformel, the promise of divine presence which had long been symbolized by the specific morpheme אֲדֹנָי was to be extended to include an entire group.26 The assurance of presence given long ago in the “then” to a single individual was to be brought into the “now” and given to everyone.27

If the first word that those experiencing God’s judgment by being estranged in Babylon needed to hear was the promise of deliverance from Exile, the concluding assurance must be that God yet had a use for them and would intimately relate to them, in however different a fashion. (Raitt, 1977, p. 135)

25. Raitt (1977, p. 63), and see his citation of Bright and von Rad.

26. See Raitt (1977, pp. 8–9) on this point of a promise which is addressed to a corporate body rather than to individuals and which includes the promise of restoration of a religio-cultural community.

27. That the basic theme in these passages revolves around the conception of Yahweh becoming God to Israel in manifest presence is further indicated by Zech 2:9, where אֲדֹנָי is used twice in the same verse:

Could not this verse be translated, “ אֲדֹנָי will become a wall of fire around here [Jerusalem], אֲדֹנָי will become glory in her midst”? Clearly, the words אֲדֹנָי and אֲדֹנָי are representations
Conclusion

It should not be thought that the weight of the case pleading for a widely-attested nominal (or at least dual nominal and verbal) function of אֱלֹהִים rests upon merely linguistic considerations. The translations suggested are believed to be permissible in each case. However, the center of the argument is to be found elsewhere, specifically in the symbolic nature and function of the word אֱלֹהִים. Words have the power to evoke emotional responses as well as intellectual or cognitive ones. אֱלֹהִים was from its first use in Israelite traditions involved in an emotional context; always its function was to express the presence of God in a promissory and assuring fashion. Always this assurance was expressed to someone who really needed it. אֱלֹהִים was a personal word, an "I" from God which one could remember and upon which one could count "in the crunch." This much is certain.

But just how far can this conception be pushed? Professor Ronald Youngblood (1972, p. 147) has asserted that, "it would be overstating the case to insist that every time God is the subject of the verb ehyeh . . . we should understand ehyeh as another attestation of the divine name." Perhaps it is an overstatement to argue for such a widely-spread nominal function of אֱלֹהִים, as Youngblood has said. But he himself has realized in part the major point which is being made here. Of course there is more involved than simply counting the number of times when אֱלֹהִים may be viewed grammatically as an allomorph of אֱלֹהִים. Here are Youngblood's words again (1972, p. 148):

It is also true that the idea behind the divine name is never very far away . . . .

Over and over again the Lord says, "I will be (ehyeh) with," or "I will be (ehyeh) the father of," Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Joshua, David and Sol-

of God, ways of ascertaining his presence in the holy city. Also clearly, one could replace אֱלֹהִים and והמת אֱלֹהִים by אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים בֹּטֵר with no loss of meaning and no change of function either for the phrase as a whole or for אֱלֹהִים specifically. Zech 2:9 merely attests two picturesque ways of saying, "I, אֱלֹהִים, will become God in a visibly manifested fashion."

A syntactically similar phrase occurs in 2 Sam 7:14 [= 1 Chr 17:13], where Yahweh speaks to David through Nathan regarding Solomon: אֱלֹהִים יְהֹוָה וְאֶל בֹּטֵר. However, here the function of אֱלֹהִים must be related to the function of אֱלֹהִים, and it is probably simpler to regard both words as verbal in function. Similarly, in 1 Chr 28:6, Yahweh assures David that Solomon will succeed him by using the words, בֹּטֵר. These two expressions retain the basic meaning of the nationally oriented Bundesformele with two important differences. First, in them the future is not distant but imminent, as in the case of the אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים form. Second, the father/son vocabulary is strongly reminiscent of certain of the royal psalms, notably Pss 2:7 and 72:1.
Over and over again the Lord says, "I will be (ehyeh) the God of" Judah, "I will be (ehyeh) as the dew to" Israel, "I will be (ehyeh) the glory within" Jerusalem. Such statements, even if they are not clear references to the divine name, I AM, at the very least hint at the significance of that name.

How indeed would it be possible to overstate the symbolic impact of ה' UserProfile? Wherever it occurs with God as subject, the weightiest of all matters were under consideration. Was God present with or absent from his people? Was the covenant relationship between people and God nulified or in the process of being recreated in his gracious sovereignty? Was the prophetic word הִיא or הִיא אל? The difference was everything. For functionally, the prophetic word הִיא implied not merely presence, but saving, sufficient, conquering, even purifying, recreative, and restoring presence. Conversely, הִיא אל meant, "none of the above."

The words of Walter Brueggeman (1977, p. 33) are intended to interpret Exodus 16. But they are appropriate to a much wider range of texts. "His glory is known, his presence discerned, and his sovereignty acknowledged in his capacity to transform the situation from emptiness to satiation, from death to life, from hunger to bread and meat." Brueggeman’s words are appropriate to more than Exodus 16 because the response of Israel to the situation encountered there is the normal pattern described throughout the Hebrew Bible. First Yahweh must act, then Israel will believe. But each new situation produced fresh doubt until the new divine act. Israel may have remembered the saving deeds of Yahweh from the past but Israel was ever unwilling to allow those past deeds to become paradigmatic for the future.

הִיא, both in the הִיא form and in the Bundesformel, represents an attempt to reverse the ‘‘normal’’ pattern. The self-disclosure of Yahweh plainly included the willingness to speak a personal word about himself, to put himself on the spot promissorily and openly. It included his readiness to say, ‘‘I will be with you’’; ‘‘I will become God to you’’; and to say these things before his capacity to act changingly had been demonstrated in a given situation but also before the capacity of Israel to be ‘‘people’’ in a new situation had been demonstrated. In short, Yahweh’s self-disclosure involved no less than his willingness to say to Israel, הִיא.

For Israel, this divine willingness to say הִיא implied that faith must not be withheld until after a demonstration of divine power, faith which could so easily be retracted at the hint of a new crisis in which God had not yet acted specifically and openly to the satisfaction of everyone. Thus if the saying of

mean that God had accepted his covenant responsibility to Israel in advance of and irregardless of particular untoward circumstances, it also constituted a challenge for Israel to respond covenantally as "people" in advance of whatever might lie in the future. For the faith of Israel to become as forward looking as was the promise of God to be present would be to approach the real meaning of being "people," and would make possible the desired relationship of "covenant."

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