

# THE DIVINE NAME אֱהִיָּה AS A SYMBOL OF PRESENCE IN ISRAELITE TRADITION

By

CHARLES D. ISBELL

*Nazarene Theological Seminary*

## Introduction

THE HEBREW BIBLE employs the morpheme אֱהִיָּה fifty-five times to perform a variety of functions. For the purposes of this paper, the nineteen times אֱהִיָּה 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 אֱהִיָּה 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 אֱהִיָּה 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the prophetic usage of אהיה always places it in the context of a situation wherein the presence (or absence) of God is of the utmost significance theologically.<sup>3</sup>

## I. אהיה as a Divine Name

It is necessary to establish from the beginning the fact that both in biblical and in post-biblical traditions, אהיה 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 יהוה . . . שלחני אהיה is the precise equivalent of יהוה in the following verse.<sup>4</sup>

A second example of אהיה used as a divine name is found in Ps 50:21. Professor Ronald Youngblood (1972) has shown that אהיה in this verse functions exactly as it does in Exod 3:14.<sup>5</sup> Because Psalm 50 is an ‘Elohim’ psalm, it is not surprising that the divine name (or title) אלהים 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) אל and (2) יהוה in v. 1, as part of the fuller sequence אל אלהים יהוה which is attested elsewhere only in Josh 22:22; (3) שפט in v. 6; (4) עליון in v. 14, parallel to אלהים; (5) אלוה in v. 22. אהיה 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 אהיה occurs may be read quite simply. אלה עשית וכמוך והחרשתי דמית היות אהיה כמורך “These things you have done and I remained silent; [accordingly] you thought אהיה was like you are.”<sup>6</sup>

A third example attesting אהיה 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 אהיה אשר אהיה formula in another article (1978).

5. Youngblood concluded that only Exod 3:14, Ps 50:21, and Hos 1:9 attest אהיה 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 *hayyôt* with Dahood (1974, I:310) and most modern commentators.

strated beyond question the nominal function of אהיה here.<sup>7</sup> His 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" (לא-אהיה); note the maqqeph) functions as a predicate noun, thus standing parallel to "not my people" (לא עמי). This makes sense, however, only if אהיה is used as in Ex 3:14 and replaces the name of Yahweh. Thus "for you" (לכם) replaces the corresponding nominal suffix in לא עמי. Thus the meaning of the sentence is: "You are not my people and I am not your אהיה."<sup>8</sup>

In addition to these three obvious and undeniable examples of the nominal function of אהיה, a fourth text may be considered which, despite the interpretation it is usually given, would appear to attest also the function for אהיה 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, ואהיה וממשכן מתהלך באהל 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 "אהיה וממשכן expresses forcibly the idea of *continuance*" [emphasis added]. However, there is another possibility which is at least equally feasible grammatically. One might view ואהיה וממשכן not as a paraphrastic but instead interpret אהיה to be a proper noun which functions as the subject of the expressed verb מתהלך. The translation of the entire phrase would then be, "but אהיה traveled in a tent and a tabernacle." Two additional reasons point to the plausibility of such a choice. First, the form מתהלך occurs elsewhere with Yahweh as its subject, notably in Gen 3:8 and Deut 23:15. Second, the form ואהיה<sup>9</sup> is available to express a narrative past tense and would normally be chosen in precisely such a context.<sup>10</sup>

7. A fact noted as well by several others. See Youngblood (1972, p. 148, note 7) for details.

8. Wolff (1974, p. 21). Mays (1969, pp. 22, 29-30) has also correctly interpreted the sentence. But notice the vigorous disclaimer of this interpretation made by Smend (1963, p. 38, note 73).

9. 1 Chr 17:5 seems to make a different judgment, "correcting" 2 Sam 7:6 to ואהיה מאהל ואהיה וממשכן, which obviously demands an additional אל משכן as often noted, and just as obviously producing a text no clearer than the one it rephrases.

10. Of the nine texts which attest ואהיה (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 אהיה in the Hebrew Bible is attested in the phrase אהיה עמך, 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 אהיה עמך may be considered permissible.

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

אהיה עמך	Josh 1:5; 3:7
ואהיה עמך	Gen 26:3; 31:3; 2 Sam 7:9 = 1 Chr 17:8
כי אהיה עמך	Exod 3:12; Judg 6:16
ואנכי אהיה עמך	Deut 31:23
ואנכי אהיה עם פריך	Exod 4:12, 15

Before proposing a suggestion for the אהיה עמך phrase, an examination of some parallel phrases which employ יהיה in place of אהיה is in order. In Josh 1:5, the sentence כאשר הייתי עם משה אהיה עמך 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 היה serve acceptably to indicate this pattern. But with this phrase which contains אהיה, Josh 1:9 must be compared: עמך יהיה אלהיך בכל אשר תלך. This sentence also is concerned with the future, as both the context and the imperfect form of הלך indicate. Consequently, even lacking an expressed copula (יהיה), the phrase עמך יהיה אלהיך 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, עמך יהיה אלהיך is simply a shorter and contextually nuanced way of expressing the same idea implied by the phrase יהיה אלהיך עמך. Significantly, precisely this latter expression *is* used in Josh 1:17, while 1 Sam 17:37 employs the comparable ויהיה יהיה עמך.

In the light of such information, it should not be thought unreasonable to propose that the specific אהיה עמך form itself often attests the grapheme אהיה

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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 אהיה. The apocapated (jussive) form ואהי 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 ואראה twenty times (plus the Kethib in Josh 7:21) alongside the apocapated form וארא which occurs fifteen times. In addition, the full form ויעשה is attested four times (1 Kgs 16:25; 2 Kgs 3:2; 13:11; Ezek 18:19), despite the fact that the apocapated form ויעש 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 יהוה. For if אהיה 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 אהיה 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 אהיה, which had been viewed as a symbol of divine presence since the days of Moses and before. Surely too the symbolic nature of אהיה would allow, on the basis of this understanding as well as the syntactically parallel יהוה עמך or יהוה עמך כי (2 Sam 7:3), that אהיה עמך might fairly be rendered, “אהיה will be with you,” or when the pronoun אנכי is used, “I, אהיה, 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 אהיה עמך as “אהיה will be with you,” is quite unconvincing apart from the acknowledgment that אהיה actually *is* used by certain biblical authors as a divine name. That is, only if אהיה can be shown to function as a proper noun can the phrase יהוה עמך be used to illuminate one’s understanding of אהיה עמך. 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 אהיה is concluded, it should be noted that post-biblical traditions of various kinds also preserve the memory of אהיה 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 אהיה functioned in the verse. These features are (1) the use of the possessive *ὑμῶν* to modify *Εμμι* (אהיה); (2) the capitalization of *Εμμι*, 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 אהיה clearly also.<sup>11</sup>

## II. The Function of the אהיה עמך Form

In each of the אהיה עמך phrases discussed above, four things are characteristic. First, Yahweh is always the subject/speaker. Second, the tense/

11. See Vermes (1973, pp. 147–166) and note also Buber (1958, pp. 39–55) and Isbell (1978).

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.<sup>12</sup> 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: **יִדְעָתִי, שָׁמַעְתִּי, רָאִיתִי**. Next, he announces, again using the past tense, his determination to act savingly in behalf of Israel: “I have come down (**וָאֵרָד**) to deliver them” (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” (**אֲשַׁלְחֶךָ**, 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 אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ** (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 **יהוה מִלְאֲךְ יְהוּדָה** greets Gideon with the words, **יְהוָה עִמָּךְ גִּבּוֹר הַחַיִּל**, “Yahweh be with you, valiant warrior” (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 (שׁי) 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. ועתה נטשנו יהוה "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 (כַּף) 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?" (הלא שלחתיך); 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 (דל) of Manasseh, and I am the youngest one (צעיר) 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: כִּי אֵהְיֶה עִמָּךְ (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).<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> And just as clearly, the **אֱהִיָּה עִמָּךְ** promise was designed to function encouragingly and reassuringly in these contexts of uncertainty and fear.

### III. **אֱהִיָּה** in Hosea 1:9

**אֱהִיָּה** is used a total of three times in the book of Hosea. 1:9, examined syntactically above, attests a theological function for **אֱהִיָּה** 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.<sup>15</sup> Beyond that, however, it would appear that the unquestionable nominal function of **אֱהִיָּה** 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 **אֱהִיָּה**. That there are numerous points of similarity and dependence between the *books* of Hosea and Deuteronomy, no one doubts.<sup>16</sup> 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 **אֱהִיָּה** 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 **אֱהִיָּה** should be allowed to function verbally. However, it is also quite possible that **אֱהִיָּה** 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. **אֱהִיָּה** is used as a noun precisely in first person speeches made by Yahweh, as all the previous examples show. Whenever **אֱהִיָּה** 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, "אֱהִיָּה 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, "אֱהִיָּה will be as dew to Israel." Again, when God is referring to himself, **אֱהִיָּה** 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.<sup>17</sup> 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 proclamation of Hosea emerged. It links Hosea to the Northern tradition of amphictyony. 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 summarizes 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 אֱהִיָּה in this regard is the fact that Hosea must have been aware of the *symbolic* significance of the term as an allomorph of יהוה not only through his demonstrated acquaintance with Israel's early epic traditions, but also through the channel which may be identified as the precursors of the Deuteronomic school.<sup>18</sup> 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 possibilities 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* (לא). 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 יהוה 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.<sup>19</sup> 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 יהוה in a chilling way to assert that God had abandoned Israel.<sup>20</sup> "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. יהוה 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 Bundesformel<sup>21</sup>

A second common function of יהוה is associated with the phrase ואני יהוה לכם/להם לאלהים which, like יהוה עמך, occurs a total of eleven times in the Hebrew Bible, five times each in Jeremiah and Ezekiel and once in Zech 8:8:

19. For example, see Brueggeman (1977, p. 146) on the turnabout from chapter one to chapter two in Hosea.

20. Wolff (1974, p. 12) dates Hos 1:2-9 "around 747-6 at the latest." On אלהי, see Eissfeldt (1945, pp. 3-16).

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 יהוה.

והיו לי לעם ואני אהיה להם לאלהים	Jer 24:7	[אני for אנכי]
	Jer 32:38	
	Ezek 11:20	
	Ezek 14:11	
	Ezek 37:23	
	Zech 8:8	
והייתם לי לעם ואנכי אהיה לכם לאלהים	Jer 11:4	
	Jer 30:22	
	Ezek 36:28	

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, והיו/הייתם לי לעם. Further, Ezek 34:24 attests יהוה and אהיה juxtaposed, ואני יהוה אהיה להם לאלהים. This is a rather uncommon phrasing which may imply nothing more than that יהוה is an explanatory gloss for nominal אהיה. But apart from these two exceptional examples, the *Bundesformel* with אהיה 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 אהיה עמך form examined earlier, 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 *reinstitution*. 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 [עשה/שמר] of Words, Laws, Statutes, etc.

Jer 11:4; Ezek 11:20; 36:27; 37:24

2. People Return, Repentance [שוב *Qal*]  
Jer 24:7; Ezek 14:6
3. Gathering [לקח/אסף/קבץ] from Many Countries  
Jer 32:37; Ezek 11:17; 36:24; 37:21
4. Divine Restoration
  - A. From Babylon/Chaldea  
Jer 24:6 [השבתים/שוב שבות]; 30:3, 18 [השבתים/שוב שבות]
  - B. From Many Countries  
Jer 32:37 [השבתים]; Ezek 36:24 [הבאתי]; 37:21; Zech 8:8
5. Purification [טהר]  
Ezek 36:25; 37:23
6. New Spirit [רוח חדשה]  
Ezek 11:19; 36:26
7. One/New Heart [לב אחד]  
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 *אהיה עמך* form, so too in these *Bundesformele*, *אהיה* 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 *אהיה* by the use of *הייתי* and *Waw-conversive* (see Jer 31: 33 and *passim*). Nor is *אהיה* necessary to indicate the first person subject, for in every case the independent personal pronoun is employed, either *אני* or *אנכי*. In short, once again *אהיה* 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 *אהיה* 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<sup>22</sup> people to me and I, *אהיה*, God to you/them." However, whether or not one should choose to translate *אהיה* 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,<sup>23</sup> 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 - ל . . . היה.

23. On this verse see Eichrodt (1970, p. 184).

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.<sup>24</sup> 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 אֱהִיָּה 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 אֱהִיָּה עִמָּךְ 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."<sup>25</sup> Certainly Jeremiah and Ezekiel both used אֱהִיָּה 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. אֱהִיָּה 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 (אֲנִי לֹא אֱהִיָּה לָכֶם), Jeremiah and Ezekiel wished to say positively (אֲנִי אֱהִיָּה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים). 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 אֱהִיָּה עִמָּךְ 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 אֱהִיָּה 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 אֱהִיָּה was to be extended to include an entire group.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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 אֱהִיָּה is used twice in the same verse:

וְאֲנִי אֱהִיָּה לָהּ נֵאֻם יְהוָה חֹמַת אֵשׁ סָבִיב  
וְלִכְבוֹד אֱהִיָּה בְּתוֹכָהּ

Could not this verse be translated, "I, אֱהִיָּה, will become a wall of fire around here [Jerusalem], אֱהִיָּה will become glory in her midst"? Clearly, the words חֹמַת אֵשׁ and כְּבוֹד 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 אהיה 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 אהיה. Words have the power to evoke emotional responses as well as intellectual or cognitive ones. אהיה 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. אהיה 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 אהיה, 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 אהיה may be viewed grammatically as an allomorph of יהוה. 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-

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of God, ways of ascertaining his presence in the holy city. Also clearly, one could replace אהיה and כבוד by אלהים with no loss of meaning and no change of function either for the phrase as a whole or for אהיה specifically. Zech 2:9 merely attests two picturesque ways of saying, "I, אהיה, 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: אהיה לך לאב והוא יהיה לי לבן. However, here the function of אהיה must be related to the function of יהיה, 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, בחרתי בו לבן ואני אהיה לו לאב. These two expressions retain the basic meaning of the nationally oriented *Bundesformel* with two important differences. First, in them the future is not distant but imminent, as in the case of the אהיה עמך form. Second, the father/son vocabulary is strongly reminiscent of certain of the royal psalms, notably Pss 2:7 and 72:1.

omon. 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 אהיה? 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 nullified or in the process of being recreated in his gracious sovereignty? Was the prophetic word אהיה or לא אהיה? The difference was everything. For functionally, the prophetic word אהיה implied not merely presence, but saving, sufficient, conquering, even purifying, recreative, and restoring presence. Conversely, לא אהיה 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.

אהיה, both in the אהיה עמר 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 promissorially 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, אהיה.

For Israel, this divine willingness to say אהיה 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

28. See for example Exod 14:31 and the pertinent comments of Childs (1974, pp. 237-239).



אֱהִיָּה meant 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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