

## “The Noun *Elohim* with Plural Predicate: Implications for Israelite Religion”

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It is well known among students and scholars of the Hebrew Bible that the noun אֱלֹהִים, though morphologically plural, is used well over two thousand times with a singular predicate. Most of these instances are due to the status of אֱלֹהִים as a proper name for the God of Israel. Instances where אֱלֹהִים refers to plural deities are usually quite transparent from the surrounding context. The same can be said of the term with the prefixed article, הָאֱלֹהִים. Of its 365 occurrences, it nearly always occurs with a singular predicate, and is only rarely used to denote plural deities. The data are again due to the fact that הָאֱלֹהִים is used so frequently of the God of Israel. However, since both אֱלֹהִים and הָאֱלֹהִים can refer to plural deities and is typically coupled with a singular predicate, instances where either term are in grammatical agreement with a plural predicator are of interest.

This interest is not a mere passing curiosity. Those scholars and students acquainted with passages like Psalm 82 and its divine council of multiple אֱלֹהִים under Yahweh know that divine plurality in the Hebrew Bible is an important issue. In view of the explicit linguistic and conceptual parallels in comparative Northwest Semitic material for a council of gods, evangelicals are faced with answering the claim of secular Semitics scholars that Israel’s faith evolved from polytheism.<sup>1</sup> When אֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים take plural predication, those uncommon occurrences are often seen as “vestiges” of Israelite polytheism. As a result, part of the evangelical exegete’s task is addressing these instances. This is the goal of this paper.

### *Initial Observations Concerning אֱלֹהִים and הָאֱלֹהִים*

Before examining the instances of אֱלֹהִים and הָאֱלֹהִים with plural predication, we need to first affirm some data points that, though fairly obvious, will nevertheless factor into the discussion.

1. אֱלֹהִים may both refer to a singular being, the God of Israel, or even a particular foreign god:<sup>2</sup>

Exodus 3:6

. . . וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב . . .

And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

<sup>1</sup> Attempts to style the אֱלֹהִים of Psalm 82:1,6 as human beings are exegetically and logically incoherent, in addition to requiring that the very explicit comparative material be ignored. For a copy of my ETS paper from the 2005 annual meeting on divine plurality in Hebrew Bible, email me at [mheiser@logos.com](mailto:mheiser@logos.com).

<sup>2</sup> All English translations are from the ESV.

1 Kings 11:33

יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּנִי וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַעֲשֵׂתֹת אֱלֹהֵי צִדְנִין לְכִמוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי מוֹאָב . . .  
Because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab . . .

2. There are obvious instances where **הָאֱלֹהִים** refers to a singular being:

Genesis 17:18

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים לוֹ יִשְׁמַעֵאל יְחִיהָ לְפָנָיִךְ:  
And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"

Genesis 20:6

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים בְּחֶלְמִים גַּם אֲנֹכִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי בְּתִם-לִבְבְּךָ עָשִׂיתָ זֹאת . . .  
Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart . . .

Deuteronomy 4:35

אִתָּהּ הָרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת כִּי יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֵין עוֹד סִלְבָדוֹ:  
To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.

3. There are clear instances where **אֱלֹהִים** and **הָאֱלֹהִים** are interchanged, demonstrating the two terms refer to the same singular being:

Genesis 20:17

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אַבְרָהָם אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּרְפָּא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ:  
Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech . . .

Exodus 3:6

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וַיִּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יָרָא מִהַבֵּית אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים:  
And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

1 Chronicles 14:14

וַיִּשְׁאַל עוֹד דָּוִד בְּאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים לֹא תֵעָלָה אַחֲרֵיהֶם . . .  
And when David again inquired of God, God said to him, "You shall not go up after them . . .

4. **הָאֱלֹהִים** does, however, occur with respect to plural divine beings (when the context clearly dictates plurality):<sup>3</sup>

Judges 10:14

לְכוּ וְזַעְקוּ אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתֶּם בָּם הֲמָה יוֹשִׁיעוּ לָכֶם בְּעֵת צָרְתֶּכֶם:  
". . . Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress."

Psalms 86:8

אֵין-כְּמוֹדְךָ בְּאֱלֹהִים אֲדָנִי וְאֵין כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ:  
"There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours."

<sup>3</sup> I exclude 1 Samuel 4:8 since the words come from a pagan.

וְהָלְכוּ עָרֵי יְהוּדָה וְיֹשְׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם וְזָעְקוּ אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְקַטְרִים לָהֶם וְהוֹשִׁיעַ לֹא־יִוֹשִׁיעֵנּוּ  
 לָהֶם בְּעֵת רָעָתָם:

Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they make offerings, but they cannot save them in the time of their trouble.

### הָאֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים With Plural Predicator

Given these examples as backdrop, we can proceed to isolate and examine אֱלֹהִים and הָאֱלֹהִים with plural predication. New syntactical search capabilities for the Hebrew Bible provided by the Andersen-Forbes Syntactically-Tagged database make such searches very straightforward. The following searches and their results follow:

#### Search #1: אֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים as subject of a plural predicator, Pred-S word order

The screenshot shows a web-based interface for a syntax query. At the top, it says "Syntax Query\*" in a green box. Below that, there are two input fields: "Database:" with the value "Andersen/Forbes Analyzed Text of the Hebrew Bible" and "Search Range:" with the value "Entire Database". Below these fields is a toolbar with buttons for "Add", "Copy", navigation arrows, and "Delete". The main content area displays the results for "Clause 1" in a yellow box. The results are structured as follows:

- Clause 1**
  - Add: Clause / Clause IC / Phr / Seg / Any / Gap / OR
  - **Clause IC 1:** Structure = { Construct Participle, Finite Verb, Infinitive Absolute, Infinitive Construct, Infinitive of Utterance, Noun-Verb Participle, Pure Verbal Participle, Quasiverbal } — Highlight
    - ↳ **Segment 1:** ((Part-Of-Speech = verb AND Number = { collective, distributive, dual, plural }))) — Any Descendant
  - Anything
  - **Clause IC 2:** Structure = { "Janus" subject-complement/subject, Distributive Subject, Subject } — Highlight
    - ↳ **Segment 2:** Text-Plain = "אלהים" — Any Descendant, Only
    - ↳ OR
    - ↳ **Segment 4:** ((Part-Of-Speech = residue AND Residue-Subclass = definite article)) — Any Descendant, First
    - ↳ **Segment 3:** Text-Plain = "אלהים" — Any Descendant, Last

Results:

Syntax Search Results

Current View 6 Occurrences

Syntax Search Results

Clause 1

Clause IC 1: Highlight — Structure = {Infinitive Absolute, Finite Verb, Infinitive ... Construct, Infinitive of Utterance, Pure Verbal Participle, Noun, Verb, Participle ...}

Other Tools

- Export results to Verse List
- Graph Bible Search Results

Andersen/Forbes Analyzed Text of the Hebrew Bible

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִתְעִו אֹתִי אֱלֹהִים מִבֵּית אָבִי וְאָמַר לִּי זֶה חֶסֶדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֵׂי עִמָּדִי אֶל כָּל־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִבְּוֵא שְׁמָהּ אֲמַרְיִלִי אָחִי הוּא:

וַיְבִן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לַמְּקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל כִּי שָׁם נִגְלוּ אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי אָחִיו:

עַל־כֵּל־דְּבַר־פֶּשַׁע עַל־שׂוֹר עַל־חֲמוֹר עַל־שָׂה עַל־שִׁלְמָה עַל־כֵּל־אֲבִדָה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר כִּי־הוּא זֶה עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יִבֹּא דְבַר־שְׁנִיָּהּ אֲשֶׁר יִרְשִׁיעַן אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁלַם שְׁנַיִם לָרַעְהוּ:

וּמִי כַעֲמֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאַרְץ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ־אֱלֹהִים לְפָדוֹת־לוֹ לְעַם וְלָשׂוּם לוֹ שֵׁם וְלַעֲשׂוֹת לָכֶם הַגְּדוּלָה וְנִרְאוֹת לְאַרְצָךָ מִפְּנֵי עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ לָךְ מִמִּצְרַיִם גּוֹיִם וְאֱלֹהִיו:

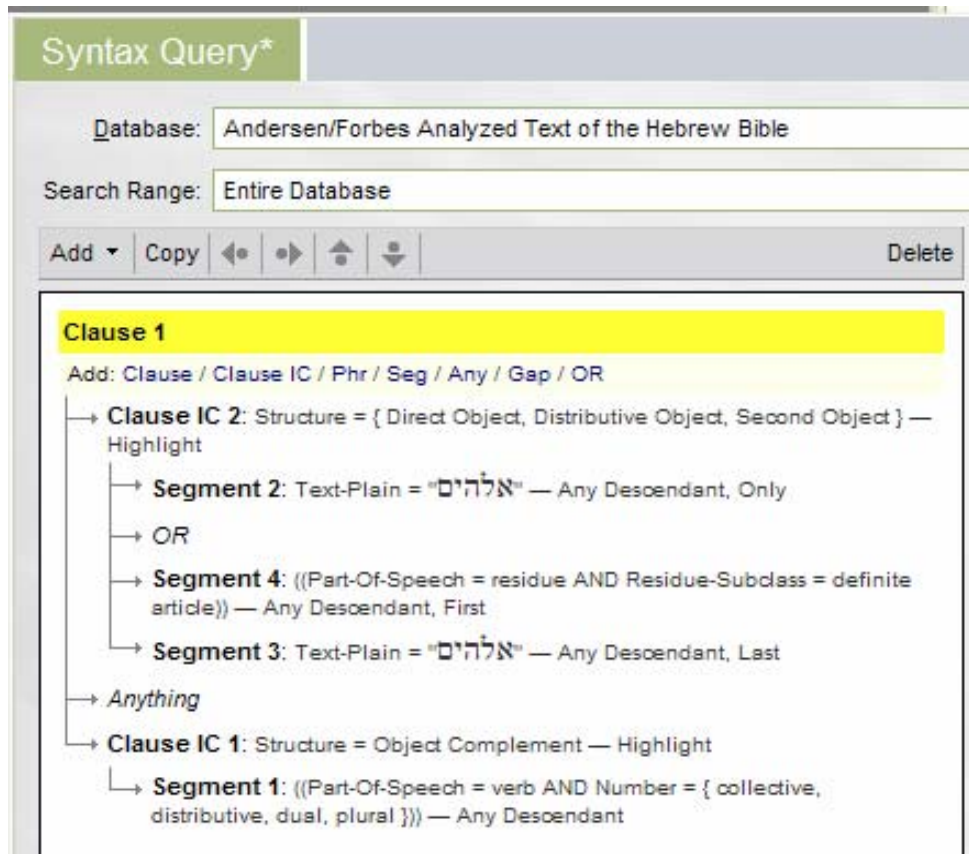
וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶזְרָבָל מִלְאָךְ אֶל־אֲלִיָּהוּ לֵאמֹר כֹּה־יַעֲשׂוּן אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסְפוּן כִּי־כַעַת מָחָר אֲשִׁים אֶת־נַפְשְׁךָ כְּנַפְשׁ אֶחָד מֵהֶם:

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלָיו בְּנֵי־הַדָּד וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹּה־יַעֲשׂוּן לִי אֱלֹהִים וְכֹה יוֹסְפוּ אִם־יִשְׁפַק עָפָר שְׁמֵרוֹן לְשַׁעֲלִים לְכָל־הָעַם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלֵי:

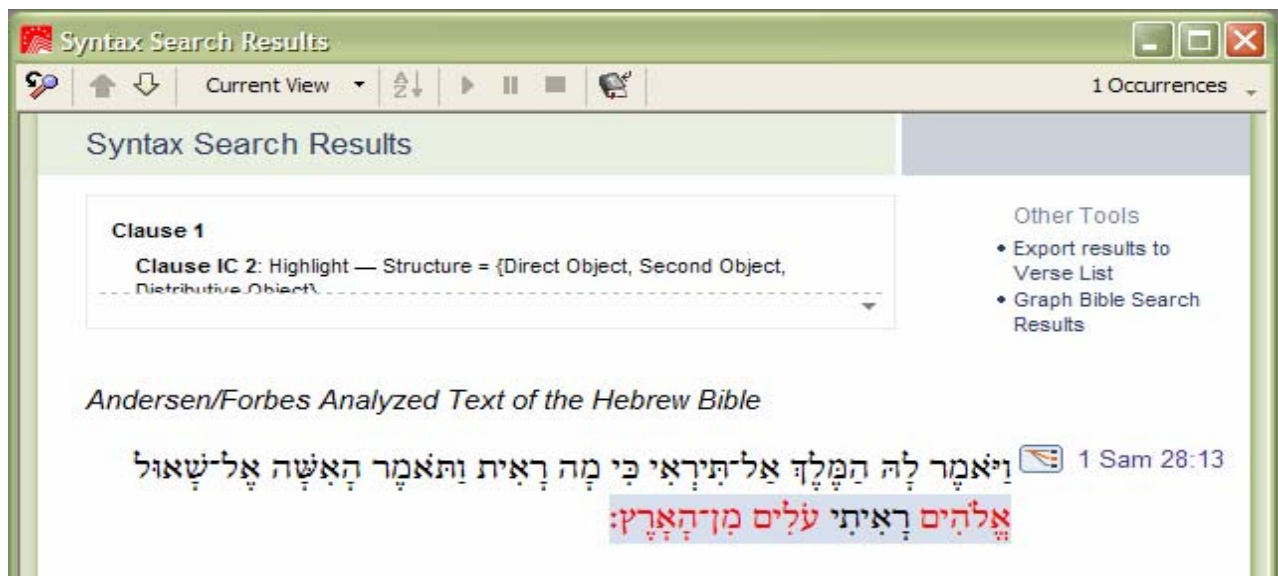
Search #2: אֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים as subject of a plural predicator, S-Pred word order

Results: none

Search #3 – אֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים as subject of a nominalized participle, S-PTCP word order



Results:



Search # 4 – Compound predicator with אלהים or אלהים in between the predicators

Syntax Query\*

Database: Andersen/Forbes Analyzed Text of the Hebrew Bible

Search Range: Entire Database

Add Copy ◀ ▶ ⬆ ⬇ Delete

**Clause IC 1:** Structure = { Construct Participle, Finite Verb, Infinitive Absolute, Infinitive Construct, Infinitive of Utterance, Noun-Verb Participle, Pure Verbal Participle, Quasiverbal }

Add: Clause IC / Phr / Seg / Any / Gap / OR

- Gap 1
  - ↳ Clause IC 2: Structure = { "Janus" subject-complement/subject, Distributive Subject, Subject, Subject of Address }
    - Segment 1: Lexeme = "ה" — Any Desoendant, First
    - Segment 2: Text-Plain = "אלהים" — Any Desoendant, Last
    - OR
    - Segment 3: Text-Plain = "אלהים" — Any Desoendant, Only
- Anything
- ↳ Segment 4: ((Part-Of-Speech = verb AND Number = plural)) — Any Desoendant, Highlight

**Options for Clause IC 1:**

▼ Search Parameters

- Highlight this term in search results
- Must be an immediate child of parent

► Occurrence

▼ Constituent

**Predicators**

- Infinitive Absolute
- Finite Verb
- Infinitive Construct
- Infinitive of Utterance
- Pure Verbal Participle
- Noun-Verb Participle
- Construct Participle
- Quasiverbal

**Time**

- Time Aim (Goal)
- Time Interval
- Time Origin

**Scoped Operators**

- "also" אף
- Exclamation
- Interrogative
- Modal

Results:

Syntax Search Results

Current View

1 Occurrences

**Clause IC 1:** Structure = {Infinitive Absolute, Finite Verb, Infinitive Construct, Infinitive of Utterance, Pure Verbal Participle, Noun-Verb Participle, Construct Participle, Quasiverbal}

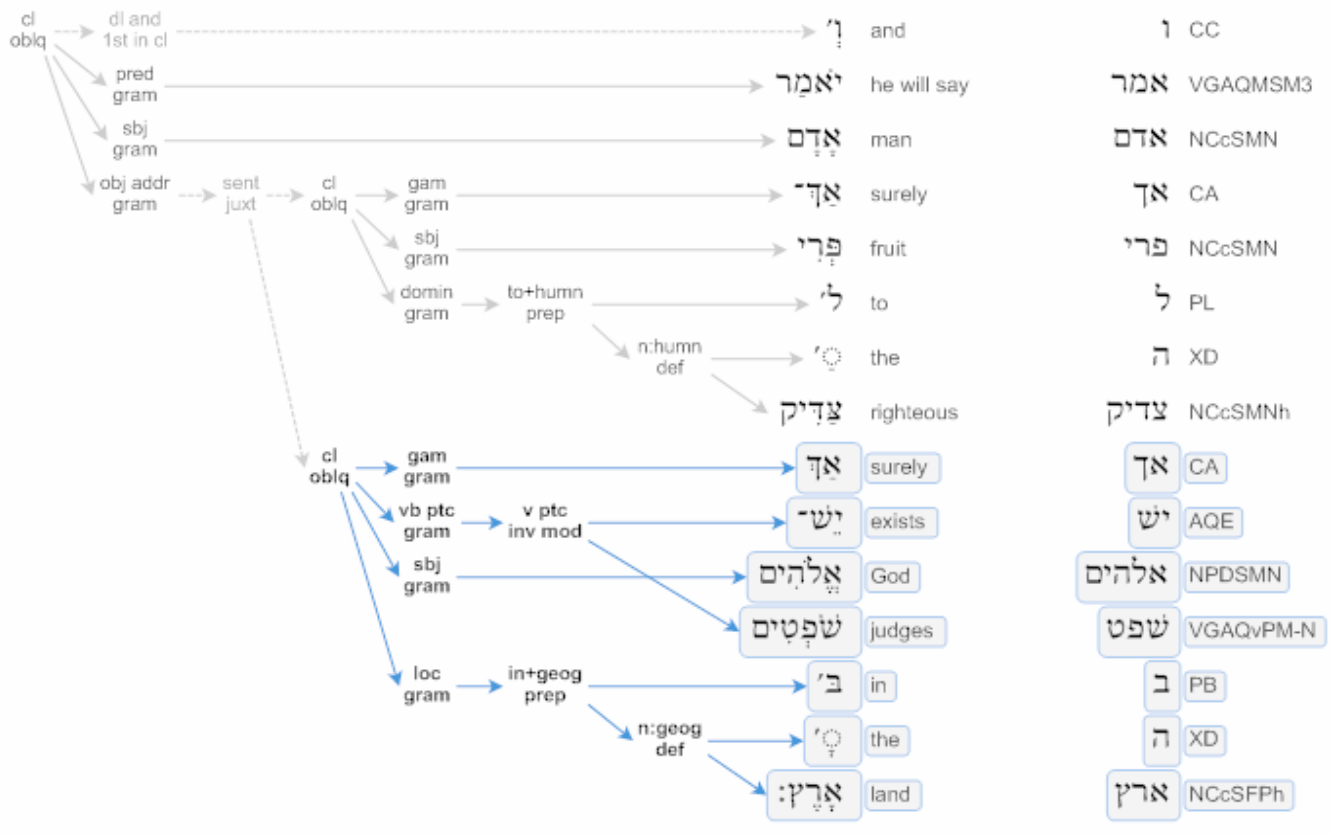
Other Tools

- Export results to Verse List
- Graph Bible Search Results

Andersen/Forbes Analyzed Text of the Hebrew Bible

וַיֹּאמֶר אָדָם אֶדְ-פָּרִי לְעִדִּיק אֱלֹהִים שִׁפְטִים בְּאָרֶץ: Ps 58:12

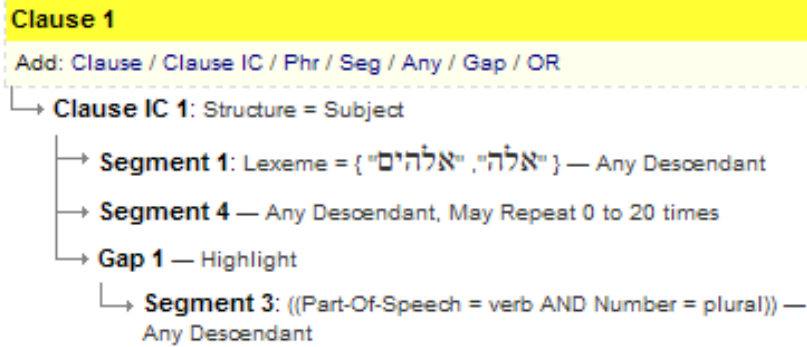
Explanation of this search:



Alternate view:



Search # 5 – **אלהים** or **האלהים** as subject of Plural Predicator When Predicator Intervenes in Subject Construction:

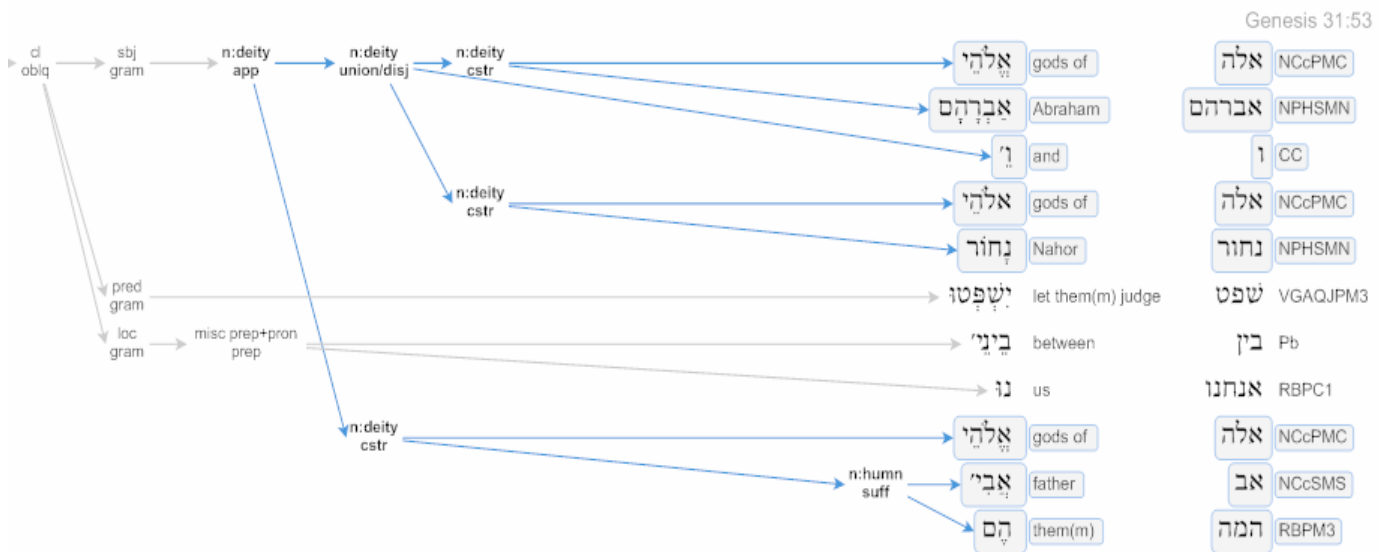


Results:

*Andersen/Forbes Analyzed Text of the Hebrew Bible*

אלהי אברהם ואלהי נחור ישפטו בינינו Gen 31:53  
 אלהי אביהם וישבע יעקב בפחד אביו  
 יצחק:

Explanation:



Note: Reversing the order of the constituents also returns Genesis 31:53, but yields a false hit—but one that still factors into our discussion:



אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וְאֱלֹהֵי נְחֹר יִשְׁפְּטוּ בֵּינֵינוּ Gen 31:53  
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְיָהֶם וַיִּשְׁבַּע יַעֲקֹב בְּפֶחַד אָבִיו  
יִצְחָק:

וְעַתָּה לֹא־אַתֶּם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִּי Gen 45:8  
הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁימֵנִי לְאָב לְפָרְעָה וּלְאֲדֹנָי  
לְכָל־בַּיִתוֹ וּמִשָּׁל בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

### Analysis and Commentary

At the outset it needs to be made clear that I have no problem with the notion that the Hebrew Bible affirms the existence of other gods. I have dealt with this subject at length and my responses to various questions such a statement raises are readily available.<sup>4</sup> That said, our analysis begins with the instances that are the least problematic—or interesting, depending on one’s perspective—and move to those that require greater scrutiny.

1 Kings 19:2 and 20:10 can be excused from any discussion of whether אֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים with plural predicator points to vestigial polytheism since both examples are statements made by Jezebel. Secular and evangelical scholars alike would agree that recorded statements and sentiments of pagans are not useful for articulating the nature of Israelite religion.

As noted above, Genesis 45:18 is a false hit. The plural verb is the predicator of the plural independent pronoun, which refers to Joseph’s brothers. However, the hit is interesting in that the plural verb could be inferred as an appropriate, but unstated, predicator for הָאֱלֹהִים. The subsequent verb (וַיִּשְׁימֵנִי) clears the matter up, as it is singular. Though הָאֱלֹהִים is used of plural deities, whenever the context of its occurrence is clearly referencing one deity, that deity is the God of Israel. This follow-up verb form is therefore consistent with what one would expect.

2 Samuel 7:23 reads as follows:

וּמִי כַעֲמֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכוּ־אֱלֹהִים לְפָדוֹת־לוֹ לְעַם וְלִשְׁוֹם לוֹ שֵׁם  
וּלְעֲשׂוֹת לָכֶם הַגְּדוֹלָה וְנִרְאוֹת לְאֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר פָּדִיתָ לָּךְ מִמִּצְרַיִם גּוֹיִם וְאֱלֹהֵיוֹ:

The finite verb form that serves as part of the predicate to אֱלֹהִים is plural. It is followed by two occasions of lamed+ infinitive + lamed + singular 3ms suffix. The singular 3ms suffixes alone do not clear up the ambiguity since singular suffixes can refer to plural antecedents. However, later in the verse the singular verb form פָּדִיתָ provides persuasive evidence that אֱלֹהִים here should be regarded as referring to a singular entity. The context of the exodus from Egypt (cf. Exodus 3:6 above), of course, makes the case for a singular entity compelling.

<sup>4</sup> See the first footnote in this paper.

The syntax of 1 Samuel 28:13 seems to be required under the circumstances. The relevant part of the text reads:

הָאִשָּׁה אֶל-שָׂאוֹל אֱלֹהִים רָאִיתִי עֲלִים מִן-הָאָרֶץ:

This is of course part of the witch of Endor story. The text could be interpreted a couple ways.

First, the medium could be saying “I saw a bunch of אֱלֹהִים coming up out of the earth” and then she zeroes in on Samuel’s spirit. Second, we could have an example of some sort of stylistic S-V (Ptcp) agreement here. Note Saul’s immediate response to what the medium says she saw:

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ מַה-תֵּאָרֶוּ (“and he said to her, ‘What was his/its appearance?’”). It could be argued that this question means that Saul understood the medium saw a single entity. Recall that Hebrew has no indefinite article. The use of the definite article here (הָאֱלֹהִים) to create congruity with Saul’s following statement would have been inappropriate, since הָאֱלֹהִים, when used of a singular entity in the Hebrew Bible, always points to the God of Israel. Having Yahweh come up from Sheol would have been theologically improper, since Yahweh resides in the heavens above the firmament.

Even in the unlikely event that there were plural אֱלֹהִים coming up out of the earth in this verse, these אֱלֹהִים do not specifically relate to the spectre of polytheism. Answering the fascinating question of just what an אֱלֹהִים is would be beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient to note now that these particular אֱלֹהִים—the spirits of human dead—were not part of the divine council. It is arguable that they were worshipped, but that issue depends on what one means by worship, whether these אֱלֹהִים can be correlated with the *Teraphim* (הַתְּרָפִים), and whether family religious practices in the form of libations to dead ancestors were part of the organized cultus.

Turning to the more intriguing examples, several passages are of importance to articulating what Israelite religion affirmed and did not affirm with respect to divine plurality.

### ***Psalm 58:12 [English, 58:11]***

For those familiar with the divine council and its activities under Yahweh, Psalm 58:12 at first glance seems to be an example of the plural אֱלֹהִים exercising governance over the nations:

אֵךְ יִשְׁ-אֱלֹהִים שִׁפְטִים בְּאָרֶץ

In favor of seeing this text as some sort of indication that the אֱלֹהִים of the Yahweh’s council rule over the earth on his behalf, appeal could be made to Deut. 32:8-9, 43 (reading with LXX and Qumran).<sup>5</sup> However, the psalmist’s exclamation (in 58:12) appears optimistic, and Psalm 82’s assessment of the governance of the אֱלֹהִים in that passage is hardly positive. Against the impact of Psalm 82, one could offer that other passages such as Daniel 7 present a more positive picture of

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 32:8-9, 43 should be contextualized with Deut. 4:19-20; 17:3; 29:25; Psa 82, and Psa 89:5-8 (Hebrew, 6-9). See Michael S. Heiser, “Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God,” *BibSac* 158:629 (Jan. 2001): 52-74; idem, “Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Honest (and Orthodox) Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible,” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Phila., PA, 2005.

the council's shared kingship under Yahweh. Daniel 7 informs us that not only is kingship and dominion handed over to the Son of Man (Dan 7:14), but also to two other groups: the "holy ones" (Dan 7:21; cp. Psa 89:5ff.) and "the people of the holy ones" (Dan 7:27). The passage's eschatological flavor seems to disqualify it as an appropriate hermeneutical aid for Psalm 58:12, however.

Even more problematic for taking the אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 58:12 to be plural deities are the first verse of the psalm and parallel passages from elsewhere in the Hebrew canon.

With respect to the former, if one accepts repointing of אֱלֹם in 58:1 [Heb., v. 2] to אֱלִים, as translations such as the ESV do ("gods"), then the point of the beginning and ending (58:12) of the psalm seems to be one of contrast. The first two verses of the psalm open with a rhetorical jab against the gods ("Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods [אֱלִים]? Do you judge the children of man uprightly? No, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth"). This would then be set in contrast to the righteous judgment of the God of Israel in the verse under question: אֵד יִשְׁ-אֱלֹהִים שֹׁפֵטִים בְּאָרֶץ ("surely there is a God who judges on earth"). This is actually in concert with Psalm 82, for in 82:8 the psalmist exclaims, "Arise O God [אֱלֹהִים], judge the earth [שֹׁפֵטָה הָאָרֶץ]!"

This brings us to the latter issue, that the same affirmation—utilizing the same verb no less—is expressed where there is no question as to the singularity of אֱלֹהִים. Psalm 67:4 ("you judge the peoples with equity"; בְּיַדְּ-שֹׁפֵט עַמִּים מִיִּשׁוּר) and Gen 18:25 ("Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"; הֲשֹׁפֵט כָּל-הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט) express the same idea. There seems to be no compelling evidence for taking אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 58:12 to be plural deities.

### **Genesis 35:7**

Genesis 35:7 presents us with an especially curious case. Backtracking to the beginning of Genesis 35, we read in 35:1-3:

God [אֱלֹהִים] said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God [לְאֵל] who appeared [הִנְרָאָה] to you when you fled from your brother Esau." <sup>2</sup> So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods [אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּכָר] that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. <sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God [לְאֵל] who answered [הִעֲנָה] me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."

Note the use of the unambiguous singular אֵל with the corresponding singular participles (Niphal, Qal). In 35:7, however, the text shows a change in this pattern:

<sup>6</sup> And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, <sup>7</sup> and there he built an altar and called the place El-

bethel, because there God [הַאֱלֹהִים] had revealed [נִגְלוֹ] himself to him when he fled from his brother.

The switch to the plural predicate with הַאֱלֹהִים is striking, to say the least. Regarding הַאֱלֹהִים as speaking of more than one deity could be argued along three lines.

First, in Genesis 28:10-21, Jacob beholds what is apparently a ziggurat-type structure in a dream at Bethel (28:19). At either the top of the structure or beside him<sup>6</sup> Jacob sees Yahweh (28:13). He also witnesses מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים ("angels of God") ascending and descending the structure. It is well known from scholarship on the divine council that the beings of the lowest tier of the cosmic hierarchy, the מְלָאכִים, are referred to as "gods" (*ʿilm*) in Ugaritic texts. There is no verse in the Hebrew Bible that specifically equates the term מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים with אֱלֹהִים, בְּנֵי הַאֱלֹהִים, or בְּנֵי אֱלִים. They are thus considered separate classes. If the plural of Genesis 35:7 speaks to multiple אֱלֹהִים, though, the מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים would be a logical referent, thus providing evidence for an identification of מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים as אֱלֹהִים. Against this incident being the backdrop is the fact that Genesis 35:1, 7 clearly identify the appearance of the God/gods in question with the time Jacob fled before Esau. That would remove Genesis 28 from consideration.<sup>7</sup> That brings us to the second, more likely, line of argument.

Jacob's encounters in Genesis 32 might be a possible backdrop for a statement of plurality. The lesser-known of these two encounters occurs in 32:1, where we read, "Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God [מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹהִים] met him." Upon seeing these beings, Jacob's response was the exclamation, "This is the camp of אֱלֹהִים," a statement very congruous with the notion of the "cosmic mountain" so prevalent as a divine council motif.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Jacob realized that this place was the place where God lived and held council.

In 32:22-32 we read the more familiar incident where Jacob wrestles with "a man" (32:24). The match culminates with Jacob's name change and injury, along with the statement, "So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God [אֱלֹהִים] face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." That this being was the מְלָאֲכֵי יְהוָה is probable due to the parallelism in Hosea 12:3-4 [Hebr., 4-5] when the prophet comments on this incident:

<sup>6</sup> The ambiguity is caused by עָלָיו in 28:13.

<sup>7</sup> In Genesis 48:3-4 we read: "And Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty [אֱלֹהֵי שְׂדֵי] appeared [נִרְאָהָ] to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.'" While this statement does refer back to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 (the blessing formula is there), this linguistic touch point does not overcome the discrepancy created by chapter 35's chronological identification. We also are not required to identify the antecedent of Genesis 35:1-7 as Genesis 28 on the grounds that it was only in Genesis 28 that Jacob built an altar to honor the deity he encountered. Genesis 35:1-7 does not have Jacob referencing an incident when he built an altar. Rather, God commands him to build an altar when he returns to the location (35:1), Jacob states that this is his intention (35:3), and then Jacob follows through with that intention (35:7). The text here does not refer to an altar built in the past, thus requiring Genesis 28 as the backdrop.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, "The Tent of El and the Israelite Tent of Meeting," *CBO* 33 (1971): 221-227; idem, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, (HSM 4; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

In the womb he took his brother by the heel;  
 and in his manhood he strove [שָׁרָה] with God [אֱלֹהִים].  
 Yes, he strove [וַיִּשָׁר] with an angel [מַלְאָךְ], and prevailed:  
 he wept, and made supplication to him;  
 he found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us.

Hosea quite clearly refers to this particular מַלְאָךְ as (an) אֱלֹהִים. The deification of that figure—or, in my view, the identification of that figure with Yahweh (as his hypostasis) is set forth most explicitly in Genesis 48: 15-16:

15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, God [הָאֱלֹהִים], before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God [הָאֱלֹהִים] who fed me all my life to this day,

16 The Angel [הַמַּלְאָךְ] who redeemed me from all evil, bless [note that the verb is 3ms *singular*] the boys; and let my name be upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

One must either interpret this verse as (1) an identification of the God of Israel as a מַלְאָךְ, (2) a reference to God sending a מַלְאָךְ to help Jacob, or (3) a particular מַלְאָךְ is here considered a deity. The first is incoherent in light of Yahweh's incomparability among all the host of heaven throughout the Hebrew Bible. The angels are created beings; Yahweh is not. The second and third options are both possible, but the third is far more likely for several reasons. First, the singular verb encompasses both entities. Had a plural verb been used here, the writer's attempt to distinguish the two would have been transparent. Second, הָאֱלֹהִים, when the context has a specific, singular entity in view, is only used of the God of Israel in the Hebrew Bible. That the God of Israel would be essentially equated with this second entity by the singular verb argues strongly that the "angel" is in fact a deity equal in essence to Yahweh (i.e., Yahweh's hypostasis). Third, the use of the article with הַמַּלְאָךְ and the parallelism of הַמַּלְאָךְ to הָאֱלֹהִים indicate a correspondence is being struck between a particular מַלְאָךְ and the God of Israel. The most plausible interpretation of the Genesis 32 event and these passages is that this particular entity [הַמַּלְאָךְ] is the deified מַלְאָךְ in whom Yahweh's Name dwells (cp. Exodus 23:20-23).

This line of reasoning would in theory provide some rationale for interpreting the plural predicator of Genesis 35: 7 as a hearkening back to Jacob's encounters with Yahweh and the deified Angel (Yahweh incarnate; cp. Gen 18) at Bethel. That is, the plural predication would be another witness to Old Testament binitarianism, but not of necessity the other lesser אֱלֹהִים of the divine council.<sup>9</sup> There are potential problems with seeing the plural predicator as inferring plural deities, though. On one hand, though the use of הָאֱלֹהִים does occur with respect to more than one deity, it is rare and points to foreign deities. This objection is not very substantive in my mind, since this kind of logic

<sup>9</sup> See my paper "Yahweh, the Sons of God, and the *Monogenes* Son of God, Yahweh's Hypostatic Vice Regent: The Divine Council of Israelite Religion as the Backdrop of High Christology and Heterodox Christologies," Paper read at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Phila., PA, 2005.

(used freely in biblical studies) amounts to “X cannot be X because there are no other examples of X.” This is hardly compelling.

My own judgment is that Genesis 35:7 may plausibly be translated, “and there he [Jacob] built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there the gods [הַאֱלֹהִים] had been revealed [נִגְלוּ] to him when he fled from his brother,” but there is nothing that compels it. Choosing the plural would not make the point that the מְלֹאכֵי אֱלֹהִים are אֱלֹהִים in any ontological sense any more than the spirits of human dead called אֱלֹהִים are ontologically the same as the single אֱלֹהִים of Israel!

אֱלֹהִים is not an ontological term; it is rather a “category” or “plane of reality” term. This is why such a variety of entities are referred to as אֱלֹהִים.<sup>10</sup> The point would be that Jacob’s “conversion” experience is consistent with the prophetic call narrative motif, where an encounter with either God in his council throne room or God and a second deity personage commences a prophet’s ministry.<sup>11</sup> And in especially dramatic fashion, Jacobs encounters the incarnate hypostasis of Yahweh as part of that experience.

### *Genesis 20: 13 and Genesis 31:53*

Genesis 20 records the story of Abraham’s deception of Abimelech by creating the impression that Sarah was his sister and not his wife. After Abraham’s ruse is revealed to Abimelech, he is forced to explain his deceit. We read, “And when God [אֱלֹהִים] caused me to wander [הִתְעוּ] from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, He is my brother.’” In the context of the divine council, the plural predicator might be cause for speculation that God and his council had appeared to Abraham and directed him to leave his home country. The question therefore is does the plural verb form in Genesis 20: 13 imply that Abraham’s initial call to leave Ur was some sort of “prophetic call narrative” with the divine council flavor noted above in our discussion of Genesis 35: 7.

There are obstacles to this thesis. First, it should be noted that the Samaritan Pentateuch reads הַתְּעוּ in the place of the plural הִתְעוּ, and so that variant must at least be considered a possible original reading, the principle of *lectio difficultior* notwithstanding. Second, the command to Abraham to leave his country and kindred first occur in Genesis 12:1. The one issuing the command

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<sup>10</sup> Aside from Yahweh and the plural אֱלֹהִים of the divine council (Psa 82:1, 6; 89:5-8) being called אֱלֹהִים, the Scripture refers to demons (שְׂדֵיִם; Deut 32:17) as אֱלֹהִים and the human dead as אֱלֹהִים (I Sam 28:13). Given the fact that I Cor. 8-10 has a strong literary relationship to Deuteronomy 32, Paul’s interchange of terms and concepts associated with “gods” and “demons” is brought into new light. It is not difficult to demonstrate that “angels” in the New Testament were considered θεοὶ since that term is used for being that occupy the positions and functions of council אֱלֹהִים in the Hebrew Bible. This would mean that words like אֱלֹהִים and θεοὶ are both “category” or “plane of reality” terms, while “angel” is a functional term (a job description for certain אֱלֹהִים or θεοὶ). See Ronn A. Johnson, “The Old Testament Background for Paul’s Identification of ‘Principalities and Powers.’” Ph.D. Diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> The more obvious examples are Moses (Exo 3:1-3) and Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-9). Jeremiah alludes directly to this idea (Jer. 23:18-22). Paul’s encounter on the Damascus road is a New Testament example (recall that Paul defends his apostleship in part on his vision of “things unutterable”). Familiarity with the fire motif and the divine council also make the tongues of fire incident in Acts 2 worthy of consideration as part of the same pattern. See Marti Nissen, “Prophets and the Divine Council,” *Kein Land für sich allein: Studien zum Kulturkontakt in Kanaan, Israel/Palastina und Ebirnari für Manfred Weippert zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Ulrich Hubner und Ernst Axel Knauf; Orbis biblicus et orientalis 186; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2002), 4-19; M. E. Polley, “Hebrew Prophecy Within the Council of Yahweh Examined in its Ancient Near Eastern Setting,” *Scripture in Context: Essays in the Comparative Method* (ed. C. D. Evans, W.W. Hallo, and J.B. White; Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 34; Pittsburgh, 1980), 141-156; Patrick D. Miller, Jr., “Fire in the Mythology of Canaan and Israel,” *CBQ* 27 (1965) 256-61.

is Yahweh, and so there is no hint of plurality there.<sup>12</sup> Despite this point of clarity, backing up in the text to 11:31 makes things a bit more interesting. There we read that Terah had taken Abraham, Sarah, and the rest of his family out of Ur prior to the divine call in 12:1. Terah, Abraham and the rest get as far as Haran, where they stop and settle. Terah is considered a polytheist by most scholars on the basis of Joshua 24:2:

And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served (וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ) other gods.

A question is raised by the plural verb and the pluralization “your fathers.” Joshua is speaking to the Israelites in this declaration. It would be convenient to argue that only Terah and Nahor were the polytheists, but the text does not make that careful distinction. Another of our plural predicator with אֱלֹהִים as subject, Genesis 31:53, is also relevant to this problem:

<sup>51</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup> This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. <sup>53</sup> The God [אֱלֹהֵי] of Abraham and the God [אֱלֹהֵי] of Nahor, the God [אֱלֹהֵי] of their father, judge [וַיִּשְׁפֹּטוּ] between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

At issue is the plural verb form וַיִּשְׁפֹּטוּ and the relationship of the characters in this verse to Joshua 24:2. One possibility is that Genesis 31:53 has the same singular God as the object of worship for Abraham, Nahor, and Terah (“their father”). It would be difficult to reconcile that assessment with the plain stated in Joshua 24:2 that *someone* in that list worshipped אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים (“other gods”).

Another possibility is that the אֱלֹהִים of Terah (and so, possibly, of Nahor) should be translated as “gods,” thus explaining the plural verb form that follows as a “catch all” statement. All of this comes from Laban, who *might* be considered a polytheist since they were his *Teraphim* Rachel had stolen (Gen 31:19).<sup>13</sup> A third possibility is something of a mixture of the previous two. The mention of the “Fear of Isaac” raises the prospect that we have the worship of more than one deity by all of these men—and yet that would not require a polytheistic outlook (at least for Abraham). That is, the “Fear” of Isaac may well be a second deity, specifically another name for the Second Person of the Israelite godhead, whom we know more readily as the מְלֶאךָ יְהוָה.

But this again, there are problems, chief among them the fact that the “Fear of Isaac” is mentioned in Genesis 31:42, a text that bears transparent similarity to 31:53:

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<sup>12</sup> It is not legitimate to raise Genesis 15:1-6 and its apparent divine plurality as a counterpoint here since that was not a call to leave Ur. For a basic overview of the divine plurality in this passage, see my paper “Yahweh, the Sons of God, and the *Monogenes* Son of God, Yahweh’s Hypostatic Vice Regent: The Divine Council of Israelite Religion as the Backdrop of High Christology and Heterodox Christologies,” Paper read at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Phila., PA, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> I express some hesitation in viewing the *Teraphim* as at the same level of idolatry as, for instance, Baal worship. *Teraphim* are typically understood as “household אֱלֹהִים”—figurines of dead ancestors (recall that the human dead are referred to as אֱלֹהִים in 1 Sam 28:13).

Some of the more godly people in the Old Testament can be connected to having *Teraphim*. For example, when David escapes Saul’s men from his own house his wife Michal fools his pursuers by placing a *Teraphim* in David’s bed (1 Sam. 19:11-17; esp. vv. 13, 16). This was David’s house, and so the assumption is that he at least allowed it under his roof if not owning it outright. Scholars are disagreed as to the significance, use, and meaning of *Teraphim*. My own opinion is that they were something akin to our practice of keeping pictures of departed loved ones. However, it has been established that food and libations were given to the *Teraphim* on occasion. Whether this is akin to our practice of leaving flowers at a grave or more down a worship trajectory is uncertain.

If the God [אֱלֹהֵי] of my father, the God [אֱלֹהֵי] of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side [הָיָה לִי], surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

The *singular* verb following this list of deity terms suggests that the plural predication in 31:53 is best understood as still referring to a singular deity, and that the Fear of Isaac is the God of Israel and not some other divine personage. This seems the most coherent perspective, and so the third possibility noted above is removed.

To avoid a contradiction between Genesis 31:53; 20:13 and Joshua 24:2, one is left with the following assessment. The plural in 31:53 indicates plural deities. This means that at least two of the individuals referred to in 31:53 (Abraham, Nahor, Terah) worshipped different gods. One then must either *exclude* Abraham from the “your fathers” description of Joshua 24:2 or *include* him as a polytheist. I think the latter is more coherent. I see no problem with saying Abraham was a polytheist at the time of Yahweh’s call. This leaves the door open for what Abraham understood as far as Genesis 20:13 goes. If one assumes that Genesis 20:13 refers to the prompting that compelled Terah and Abraham and Nahor, etc. to leave Ur referred to in Genesis 11:31, then one could postulate that Abraham at that time thought “the gods” were prompting this action. However, Genesis 20:13 seems to refer not to Genesis 11:31 but to 12:1 (“from my fathers house”; cf. 12:1 and cp. 11:31). That would mean the plural predicator of Genesis 20:13 does not refer to plural deities, but only to the singular God of Israel. This is hardly unprecedented. This conclusion is supported by appeal to Genesis 20:6, 17, where the verbs are singular.

### **Exodus 22:8-9 (Hebrew, 7-8)**

The final example of אֱלֹהִים or הָאֱלֹהִים with plural predicator is also an important text for the divine council. Exodus 22:8-9 is a favorite text of appeal for those who want to deny that the plural אֱלֹהִים of Psalm 82:1b and 82:6 (also called בְּנֵי עֲלִיוֹן) are divine beings. These council אֱלֹהִים, so the objection goes, are human beings, the elders of Israel. Demonstrating that this objection is incoherent is not difficult, and does not even require venturing into Exodus 22:8-9. Those who offer this objection seem to universally omit the statement in Psalm 89:6 [Hebrew, v. 7] where we read in very clear terms: בִּי מִי בַשָּׁמַיִם יִעָרֵךְ לַיהוָה יְדָמָה לַיהוָה בְּבָנֵי אֱלֹהִים (“For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of God is like the LORD?”). The בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים are in heaven, not on earth, which undermines the objection completely. Nevertheless, Exodus 22:8-9 deserves attention.

The passage in context reads:

<sup>7</sup> “If a man gives to his neighbor money or goods to keep safe, and it is stolen from the man’s house, then, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. <sup>8</sup> If the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to God [הָאֱלֹהִים] to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor’s property. <sup>9</sup> For every breach of trust, whether it is for an ox, for a donkey, for a sheep, for a cloak, or for any kind of lost thing, of which one says, ‘This is it,’ the case of both parties shall come before God [הָאֱלֹהִים]. The one whom God [אֱלֹהִים] condemns [יִרְשִׁיעַ] shall pay double to his neighbor.

It is argued by those who wish to deny plural *divine* אֱלֹהִים in Psalm 82 that the אֱלֹהִים / הָאֱלֹהִים in this passage should be interpreted as plural *human* beings, the elder-judges of Israel selected as a



result of Jethro's insistence to Moses that the latter was taking on too much responsibility in deciding the disputes of the Israelite congregation. The plural predicate, it is further argued, supports this view. The pertinent phrases should therefore be translated as follows:

- "If the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to the gods [הַאֱלֹהִים]; i.e., the elders of Israel.
- "both parties shall come before the gods [הַאֱלֹהִים]; i.e., the elders of Israel.
- "The one whom the gods [אֱלֹהִים]—the elders of Israel—condemn [יְרַשְׁעוּ] shall pay double"

On the surface this perspective appears sound. It should be noted at the outset that even if correct this view would not answer the textual reality of plural אֱלֹהִים in the skies in Psalm 89. The elders of Israel are not holding session in the clouds. Aside from the issue of the divine council, though, this interpretation lacks internal coherence.

First, as we have seen, it would be generally unusual for אֱלֹהִים to indicate plural beings. On the rare occasions when this happens elsewhere, the referents are not godly; they are the gods of the other nations. Second, if the interpretation sketched above were correct, this would be the only passage in the Hebrew Bible where אֱלֹהִים "certainly" does *not* speak of the single God of Israel. Genesis 35:7 may provide instance number two, but that would hardly support the point of "human אֱלֹהִים" this view wants so earnestly to prove. Appeal to Genesis 35:7, then, is cut off.

Proponents of the "human אֱלֹהִים" view often cite Exodus 21:2-6 in support:

When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. <sup>3</sup> If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. <sup>4</sup> If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. <sup>5</sup> But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' <sup>6</sup> then his master shall bring him to God [הַאֱלֹהִים], and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

The argument is made that the master is commanded to bring the slave before the elders of Israel before piercing his ear, and that these elders are called אֱלֹהִים. This position overlooks the troublesome parallel of Deut. 15:17:

<sup>15</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. <sup>16</sup> But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, <sup>17</sup> then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever.

The problem, of course, is that the phrase that includes reference to אֱלֹהִים has been removed. Why would this have been done if the text commanded the master to first bring the slave before the elders? That step would seem to be important. Seventy years ago Cyrus Gordon pointed out that the omission in Deuteronomy appears to have been theologically motivated.<sup>14</sup> Gordon argued that

<sup>14</sup> Cyrus H. Gordon, "אֱלֹהִים in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges," *JBL* 54 (1935): 139-44.

הַאֱלֹהִים in Exodus 21:16 referred to “household gods” like the *Teraphim*. Bringing a slave into one’s home in patriarchal culture required the consent and approval of one’s ancestors. Under Deuteronomistic redaction this phrase was omitted in the wake of Israel’s struggle with idolatry.<sup>15</sup> The strength of this position is that it presents a plausible motive for the deletion, whereas the other view lacks an explanation. That *Teraphim* could be considered אֱלֹהִים is no surprise given 1 Samuel 28:13, where the departed spirit of Samuel is referred to with אֱלֹהִים. Moreover, one would ask why it is so implausible to have Exodus 21:6 commanding the master to bring his slave before a singular entity—the God of Israel—so as to promise before the true God that the slave’s status has indeed been changed. There is no compelling need to see a plural in this passage, and so it fails as support for Exodus 22:8-9 and the “human אֱלֹהִים” view.

The real problem with this view, however, arises from the passage where Jethro appeals to Moses to select helpers.

<sup>13</sup> The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. <sup>14</sup> When Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, “What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?” <sup>15</sup> And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God [אֱלֹהִים]; <sup>16</sup> when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws.” <sup>17</sup> Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. <sup>18</sup> You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. <sup>19</sup> Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God [אֱלֹהִים] be with you! You shall represent the people before God [הַאֱלֹהִים] and bring their cases to God [הַאֱלֹהִים], <sup>20</sup> and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. <sup>21</sup> Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>22</sup> And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. <sup>23</sup> If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.” <sup>24</sup> So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. <sup>25</sup> Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. <sup>26</sup> And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. <sup>27</sup> Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.

The points to be made here are straightforward: (1) the men appointed by Moses are never called אֱלֹהִים or הַאֱלֹהִים in the text; (2) even after the elders are appointed, the singular God is still hearing cases. There is nothing in the text of the passage that compels us to understand אֱלֹהִים or הַאֱלֹהִים in Exodus 22:8-9 as plural. As other passages demonstrate with clarity, the plural predicate alone does not require the noun be translated as plural. My view is that Exodus 22:9 is

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<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomistic redaction can be considered legitimate without holding to a late composition for Deuteronomy. The two issues are not necessarily related.

simply saying that, "The one whom the singular God [אֱלֹהִים] condemns [יְרֻשֵׁעַן] shall pay double to his neighbor."

### ***Conclusion***

אֱלֹהִים or אֱלֹהִים with plural predication produces some intriguing passages, but these rare cases of grammatical agreement should not be seen as theologically explosive. Neither do these passages provide forceful evidence for the lesser deities of the divine council, with the possible exception of Genesis 35:7. That passage's contribution to Israelite religion's divine council seems to be its consistency with the prophetic call narratives that include an encounter with the council and Yahweh. It may also provide ancillary support for Israelite binitarianism.