Some Notes on the Use of הָיָה in Genesis

ROYDEN KEITH YERKES
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THERE are eighteen occurrences of the word הָיָה in Genesis, omitting 357 (with LXX, Luc., and Vulg.), and reading לִי for לְיָה in 4925 (with LXX, Luc., 3 Mss., Sam., and Syr.). It occurs five times with the article, either simply (3113 and 463, both E), or with a preposition (351E and 4925J). Of the thirteen remaining instances, one is the לִי לָי 3320 (E), with which may be compared the לִי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי לָי L. The others are all in the epithetical combinations, לִי לָי לָי לָי (1418. 19. 20. 22), לִי לָי לָי (1613J), לִי לָי לָי (1712833511483, all P, 4814E, and 4925J), and לִי L (2133J). All but four of these instances are from Preprophetic writings, and generally admitted to be based upon very old, possibly Premosaic, traditions, and the four uses of לִי L in P are confirmed by both J and E, and therefore probably from a similarly old tradition. For the sake of simplicity I shall not translate the term at present, but shall content myself with the simple transcription of the Hebrew letters, El.

We have here to do with a common Semitic word, which appears also in Phœnician, in Aramaic, in Assyrian, and in Arabic. To the present writer it appears certain that it had a wide use in the early Hebrew traditions, and that the
recorders of those traditions, J, E, and P, intentionally, and for theological reasons, substituted the בַּדֵּי or בְּדֵי for an original reading לֹא. It is the oldest Semitic term for “deity,” “divinity,” and, as such, was applied to the numina which were believed to frequent the ancient sacred stones, trees, and springs. But, even in Premosaic times, it connoted far more than the idea of the local numen, and the writers of the prophetic schools J and E saw in it merely a synonym of היה or יהוה, which they constantly used.

In 35:1 (E) Jacob is commanded to go to Bethel and build an altar לַאֲלָלָא הָעָנָא לָאֲלָי “to the El who appeared to thee,” and in v. 3 he proposes to obey the command, and to build an altar לַאֲלָלָא הָעָנָא לָאֲלָי, “to the El who answers me,” while in 31:13 (E) he is described as recording the words of a vision לַאֲלָי הָאֶלֶל בֵּית הָאֲלָי, “I am the El, Beth-el,” or “I am the El at Bethel.” The LXX translators, as well as the Targums (Onkelos and Jonathan), realizing the impossibility of the article with a word in the construct, and knowing nothing of the possibility of Beth-el as a possible proper name of a divinity, read לָאֲלָי הָאֶלֶל הָעָנָא לָאֲלָי בֵּית הָאֲלָי. The reference is plainly to the Bethel vision recorded by both J and E, whose records are combined in 28:11-22. There is a general unanimity of opinion in the assignment of these verses to their respective sources, and, for our purpose, the accepted division serves all needs. To J belong vv. 10, 15-18, 19 and 21 b; vv. 11-12, 17-18, 21 a and 22 belong to E.

The two accounts agree in the following points:

1) That Jacob accidentally chose the spot as a place in which to spend the night.

2) That, while he was sleeping, some sort of theophany occurred there as an entire surprise to him.

8) That, accordingly, he termed the place a “Beth-el.”

In J all reference to the stone or to the ladder is omitted, and it is Jahweh himself, and not one of his angels, who appears to the sleeping wanderer. But the passage looks as if the writer had taken an old tradition and intentionally omitted parts, and, instead of the בַּדֵּי which belonged to the original, used the name היה, excepting in the name of the
place, where it would be obviously impossible in a narrative that purported to give the etymology of the famous shrine Bethel. Accordingly Jacob is made to say that because Jahweh was in the place, and he was unconscious of the fact, he would call the place "Beth-el," which is something of a non sequitur. This difficulty, as well as the linguistic awkwardness of v. 16 is removed if, instead of שִׁים יְהֹוָה בָּתֵּל, we read אל הבטול יְהֹוָה.

On the other hand, E has omitted none of the old tradition, mentioning even the anointing of the stone, but the intimate association of God with the stone, or with the place, as in J, was contradictory to his theological conceptions, that the dwelling place of God was in heaven, and he has therefore altered the tradition to keep it in harmony with that notion. It is not God himself, but his angels, which E records as appearing to the wanderer. However, he neglects to make this change in his reference to the story in 35 1, which preserves, not only the tradition of the theophany, but even the original word יְהֹוָה, instead of the later plural יְהֹוָה. It would seem that the original tradition underlying this passage was that of the appearance of an El at a sacred stone.

The same result appears from a study of the flight of Hagar (16 1-14, all J except 9-10 E). Hagar flees from Sarai, and the אֶלֶף מְלָכָא יְהֹוָה finds her by קָרָאת שָׁם מְלָכָא יְהֹוָה. He tells her she is pregnant, and promises a future for her son, adding קָרָאת שָׁם מְלָכָא יְהֹוָה אל יִתְנָךְ. The story continues by saying שָׁם מְלָכָא יְהֹוָה אֲלֵיהֶנָּה. From the form of v. 11 we should expect the name מְלָכָא, but, if we substitute אֲלֵיהֶנָּה for יְהֹוָה, the verse reads readily enough. Again, it is the מְלָכָא who addresses Hagar, but in v. 11 it appears that the divinity himself had spoken. The suggested emendation is to supply, as the original reading, קָרָאת מְלָכָא יְהֹוָה in vv. 7 and 11. Finally, the word מְלָכָא is out of place. It is the only connection of this word with יְהֹוָה. The most natural word to be expected, whether we use יְהֹוָה or יְהֹוָה as the subject, is יַעֲרֵה. Likewise, in v. 13, instead of the very late Qal participle יִדְרָכָא, we should
expect 8ת. The emended verses, then, would read

The ו if 17 1 (P) is evidently a later interpolation. Another subject stood in this place in the original document which was used by P. If that subject had been the word usually used by P, there would be little reason for the change. If, however, the subject was 3ת, we have another instance of a stereotyped form, 8ת 3ת, with which narratives of theophanies were wont to begin in the ancient traditions. My suggestion is that there was such a form, and that in J this was regularly changed to 8ת or 8ת, while in E it naturally became 8ת (12 18 1 26 2. 35 9 46 20).

Into the etymologies of the epithets compounded from I cannot enter here. In general, they describe some activity, physical or moral, of the El. More important is the question whether they are the names of separate and individual deities, or whether they are different appellatives of the same deity, or, in other words, whether there was a common deity worshiped by the Israelite tribes, or the Semitic ancestors of those tribes, in Premosaic times.

In the so-called “blessing of Jacob” (chap. 49), there occurs in the address to the tribe of Joseph (v. 28) the expression 8ת 3ת, which is paralleled, according to the emended reading, with 8ת 3ת. In the dream of 46 3 (E) the deity is represented as saying 8ת 3ת. This verse may be regarded in one of two ways. It may be considered as a fuller form of 8ת 3ת, thus probably paralleled with the expression “God of the fathers,” which occurs in all the Preexilic documents of the Pentateuch (Ex. 3 6 E, 4 5 J, and often in the prefatory and concluding chapters of Deuteronomy). On the other hand, 8ת may be considered as a proper name, and 8ת as an attributive clause.