

# JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES ON הִתְעַוָּה IN GENESIS 20:13 IN THE ANCIENT, MEDIAEVAL AND REFORMATION EXEGESIS

by Matthew Oseka

## Introduction

THE PLURAL FORM of the verb (הִתְעַוָּה), for which אֱלֹהִים acted as the subject in Genesis 20:13, was often brought up for discussion in the history of biblical exegesis. Modern commentaries<sup>1</sup> tend to explain this intriguing form as Abraham's accommodation to Abimelech's polytheistic background, namely, as a rhetorical concession made by Abraham to Abimelech. Indeed, it is arguable that within the parameters of the narrative Abraham tried to appease Abimelech and therefore adopted the phrasing which was common and absolutely inconspicuous.

From a historical perspective, the plural forms concerning the Divine (e.g. Gen. 1:26; 11:7; 20:13) acted as focal points for exegetical and theological discussions in Jewish and Christian traditions. Granted that the literature on the origin of the Jewish<sup>2</sup>

---

1. As typified by: August Dillmann, *Genesis Critically and Exegetically Expounded*, vol. 2, trans. William Black Stevenson (Edinburgh: Clark, 1897), 122 [Genesis 20:13]; Samuel Rolles Driver, *The Book of Genesis with Introduction and Notes* (London: Methuen, 1904), 208 [Genesis 20:13]; Carl Friedrich Keil, *Biblischer Kommentar über die Bücher Mose's*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1878), 204 [Genesis 20:13]; Andrew J. Schmutzer, "Did the Gods Cause Abraham's Wandering? An Examination of הִתְעַוָּה אֶתִי אֱלֹהִים in Genesis 20:13," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35/2 (2010); Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis: 16-50*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998), 73 [Genesis 20:13]. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 326-327 [Genesis 20:13].

2. Wilhelm Bacher, *Abraham ibn Esra als Grammatiker: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hebräischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strasbourg and London: Trübner, 1882). Idem, *Die Anfänge der hebräischen Grammatik* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1895). Idem, *Die Biblexegese Moses Maimunis* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1897). Idem, *Die Biblexegese der Jüdischen Religionsphilosophen des Mittelalters vor Maimuni* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1892). Idem, *Die exegetische Terminologie der Jüdischen Traditionsliteratur* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905). Idem, *Die hebräische Sprachwissenschaft vom 10. bis zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Trier: Mayer, 1892). Ludwig Geiger, *Das Studium der hebräischen Sprache in Deutschland vom Ende des XV. bis zur Mitte des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Breslau: Schletter, 1870). William Horbury, ed., *Hebrew Study from Ezra to Ben-Yehuda* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1999).

and Christian<sup>3</sup> Hebrew studies, on the patristic Trinitarian interpretation of the Tanakh<sup>4</sup> and on the generic name of God<sup>5</sup> is immense, the present paper focuses on the Jewish and Christian interpretations of הַקְדוּשָׁה in Genesis 20:13 until the first half of the sixteenth century. It should be noted that Schmutzer's study of Genesis 20:13 is substantial and well-researched though the classification קדוּשׁ - הוּל recorded in the

---

3. Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in Dispute: Disputational Literature and the Rise of Anti-Judaism in the West c. 1000-1150* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998). Idem, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995). Wolfgang Bunte, *Rabbinische Traditionen bei Nikolaus von Lyra: Ein Beitrag zur Schriftauslegung des Spätmittelalters* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1994). Stephen G. Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era 1500-1660: Authors, Books and the Transmission of Jewish Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, ed., *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983). Herman Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963). Alberdina Houtman, Eveline van Staaldune-Sulman and Hans-Martin Kim, ed., *A Jewish Targum in a Christian World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983). Deena Copeland Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). Louis Israel Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925). Emil Silberstein, *Conrad Pellicanus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Studiums der hebräischen Sprache in der ersten Hälfte des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1900). Eva De Visscher, *Reading the Rabbis: Christian Hebraism in the Works of Herbert of Bosham* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Bernhard Walde, *Christliche Hebraisten Deutschlands am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1916).

4. Jules Lebreton, *Les origines du dogme de la Trinité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1919), 507-512 [III, VI, Note B]. Westermann, "Excursus: The History of the Exegesis of Gen 1:26-27," in *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 147-148 [Genesis 1:26-27]. Robert McLachlan Wilson, "The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1:26," *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957): 420-437. Gregory T. Armstrong, *Die Genesis in der alten Kirche: Die drei Kirchenväter* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962).

5. N. A. Dahl and Alan F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 9, no. 1 (1978): 1-28. Anne E. Draffkorn, "Ilani / Elohim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76, no. 3 (1957): 216-224. Cyrus Herzl Gordon, "אלהים in Its Reputed Meaning of 'Rulers,' 'Judges,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54, no. 3 (1935): 139-144. Ari Mermelstein and Shalom E. Holtz, ed., *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015). Murray J. Harris, "The Translation of Elohim in Psalm 45:7-8," *Tyndale Bulletin* 35 (1984): 65-89. Michael S. Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158, no. 629 (2001): 52-74. Jan Joosten, "A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy 32:8," *Vetus Testamentum* 57, no. 4 (2007): 548-555. Helmer Ringgren, "אלהים," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 267-284.

tractate Sofrim and in the Talmudic literature was confused with textual marginal notes (קרי) unique to the Masoretic apparatus.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Linguistic Elucidation

In Hebrew the logic of concord is determined by *constructio ad sensum* both grammatically (especially in terms of number) and syntactically.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, lexical and syntactical features of אלוהים / אלוה are noteworthy. Given the limitations of the present study, the phenomena mentioned above can only be adumbrated in the following section.

Generally speaking, Hebrew permits of some discrepancy in number as long as the message is clearly communicated in the light of the context. For instance, in Genesis 39:20 Joseph's master was depicted as אֲדֹנָי, not אֲדֹנֵי, while in Genesis 42:30 and 33 a single ruler was described as אֲדֹנֵי הָאָרֶץ. Similarly, in Exodus 21:29 and 22:14/15 "its [i.e., an animal's] master [videlicet owner]" was called בְּעֵלָיו, not בְּעֵלוֹ. In grammatical terms both אֲדֹנֵי and בְּעֵלָיו must be parsed as plural though the context rendered these forms singular and their singular signification was mirrored in the Targum Onkelos<sup>8</sup> and in the Septuagint.<sup>9</sup>

Syntactically, biblical Hebrew is accustomed to shifting personal or possessive<sup>10</sup> pronouns within the framework of the narrative provided that the message is duly conveyed. Hebrew is also prone to repeating proper nouns even if they could be replaced with personal pronouns. These phenomena can be exemplified by Genesis 4:23, 19:24 and Exodus 24:1. Consequently, Genesis 4:23 reads "Lamech said to his wives [נשיו]: 'Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech [נשי למך], hear my words [...]" (NIV) albeit "my wives" (נשיי) would make more sense to the contemporary audience focused on the congruity than "wives of Lamech" attested in the original text.

In Genesis 19:24b God's very name, which actually functions as a proper noun, was repeated though a personal pronoun ("he") could be employed instead: "[a] And the LORD rained brimstone upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah, [b] fire [was rained] from the LORD out of the heavens." Nonetheless, it could be argued that Genesis 19:24a and Genesis 19:24b were parallel to one another and in this case the repetition of the subject would be anticipated.

Exodus 24:1 reads "And he said [אמר] to Moses: 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron [...]" and in view of the preceding verses the LORD was the subject of the verb

6. Schmutzer, "Did the Gods Cause Abraham's Wandering? An Examination of הַתְּעוּ אֵתִי in Genesis 20:13," 160.

7. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew Grammar*, ed. Emil Kautzsch and Arthur Ernest Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 462-468 [§ 145-146].

8. Abraham Berliner, ed., *Targum Onkelos*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Kauffmann, 1884), 44 [Genesis 39:20]. Ibid., 48-49 [Genesis 42:30-33]. Ibid., 84 [Exodus 21:29]. Ibid., 84 [Exodus 22:14/15].

9. Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887), 77 [Genesis 39:20]. Ibid., 84 [Genesis 42:30-33]. Ibid., 146 [Exodus 21:29]. Ibid., 148 [Exodus 22:14/15].

10. In pronominal suffixes, to be precise.

“said” (אמר). Thus, contemporary readers would expect the pronominal suffix of the first person singular with the preposition (אלי - to me) in lieu of “to the LORD” (אל יי). Ostensible syntactical incongruities as typified by Genesis 4:23, 19:24 and Exodus 24:1 were discussed in the Talmudic literature<sup>11</sup> and were perceived as features common and natural to biblical narratives.

Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible אלהים / אלוהים could denote not only God of Israel but also different agents of power such as judges, leaders, nobles, the mighty, angels or idols, depending on the context. In principle, אלוהים / אלוהים might stand for the object of worship (true God or false god[s]), for intermediaries between God and humankind (angels) and for religious or social leaders. Regardless of its specific meaning, אלוהים, which could be parsed as a plural form of אלה, occurred with singular or plural verbal, adjectival, participial, pronominal or imperatival forms in the Tanakh. Besides, in the Hebrew Scriptures there were plural forms connected to the Divine which appertained to verbs (Gen. 1:26, 11:7, 20:13, 35:7; 2 Sam. 7:23; Isa. 41:21-26), to pronominal suffixes (Gen. 1:26, 3:22; Isa. 6:8, 41:21-26) and to adjectives or participles (Deut. 4:7, 5:23/26; Josh. 24:19; 1 Sam. 17:26; Isa. 42:5, 54:5; Jer. 10:10, 23:36; Ps. 58:12, 149:2; Job 35:10; Eccl. 12:1).

## 2. Study of Text and Ancient Translations

The Masoretic text of Genesis 20:13 was uniform and contained a plural form of the verb (התעו) of which אלהים was the subject, while the Samaritan text<sup>12</sup> provided the singular form (התעה) which was also adopted in the Samaritan Targum.<sup>13</sup> It is advisable to visualise the LXX<sup>14</sup> and Targumic<sup>15</sup> interpretations of Genesis 20:13 because they reflected existing strategies of interpretation and inspired those which emerged subsequently:

LXX	Targum Onkelos	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
And it was when		
God brought me (ἐξήγαγέν)	the people / nations erred (טעו)	they sought to make me err (לאטעאה)
	after the works of their hands,	by serving idols
	the LORD led me to fear him	and I went
out of my father's house [...]		

11. E.g., “סנהדרין,” תלמוד בבלי, vol. 13 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1862), 38v [No. 38b].

12. August von Gall, ed., *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner*, vol. 1 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1914), 33 [Genesis 20:13]. Similarly, in Genesis 35:7 the Samaritan text read the singular נגלה in lieu of the plural נגלו. Ibid., 72 [Genesis 35:7].

13. Adolf Brüll, ed., *Das samaritanische Targum zum Pentateuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Erras, 1875), 21 [Genesis 20:13].

14. Swete, ed., *The Old Testament*, vol. 1, 32 [Genesis 20:13].

15. Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 19 [Genesis 20:13]. “Targum [Pseudo]-Jonathan,” in *Biblia sacra polyglotta*, vol. 4, ed. Brian Walton (London: Roycroft, 1657), 35 [Genesis 20:13].

It appears that the strategy of translation did not depend on the plural form of the verb (הִתְעָה) but rather on the verb itself. The Septuagint presumed that the verb תַּעַה in the Hiphil denoted “to cause to wander” or “to bring / lead out of.” According to the Targum Onkelos and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, תַּעַה in the Qal communicated “to err” and in the Hiphil – “to lead astray,” “to cause to err” or “to make err.” This would be consistent with the negative meaning of טַעָא which was an Aramaic counterpart of the Hebrew תַּעַה.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the Targumim were reluctant to allow אֱלֹהִים (if interpreted as God) to be the subject of this verb. Consequently, the people / nations, plausibly idolaters, either worshipped idols (the Targum Onkelos) or wanted Abraham to worship idols (the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) but Abraham left his father’s house either on his own (the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) or as a result of the LORD bringing him out of that house (the Targum Onkelos). Since in those Targumim “the people / nations” became the subject of the plural form of the verb, it was disconnected from אֱלֹהִים and was no longer problematic. The context implies that “the people / nations” mentioned in the Targum Onkelos might refer to idol worshippers from the neighbourhood of Abraham’s father.

The Vulgate<sup>17</sup> rendition of Genesis 20:13 imitated the Septuagint and both translations evaded the difficulty of the Hebrew original which was caused by the plural form of the verb with אֱלֹהִים. It is notable that Graecus Venetus,<sup>18</sup> which was a late mediaeval Jewish translation of the Pentateuch and of some other books of the Tanakh into vernacular Greek independent of the Septuagint, handled Genesis 20:13 either “gods (οἱ θεοὶ) led me from my father’s house” or “gods (οἱ θεοὶ) deceived me at my father’s house,” depending on the interpretation of the Greek verb *πλανᾶω* occurring with the preposition *πρός* cum the genitive case.

### 3. Jewish Interpretations of Genesis 20:13

Sofrim (סופרים),<sup>19</sup> which belongs to the minor tractates<sup>20</sup> in the Babylonian Talmud, examined the meaning of אֱלֹהִים / אֱלֹהִים in certain passages, classifying it either as “divine” (קדוש) or as “non-divine” (חול). Actually, the qualifier קדוש (literally: sacred, holy) indicated that אֱלֹהִים / אֱלֹהִים denoted the LORD (יְיָ), God of Israel, while the

16. Jacob Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim und einen grossen Teil des rabbinischen Schrifttums*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Baumgärtner, 1867), 311-312 [s. v. טַעָא]. Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (נתן בן יהיאל מרומי), *Rabbinisch-aramäisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zur Kenntnis des Talmuds, der Targumim und Midraschim*, vol. 3, ed. Moses Israel Landau (Prague: Scholl, 1820), 743 [s. v. טַעָא].

17. Konstantin Tischendorf and Theodor Heyse, ed., *Biblia sacra Latina Veteris Testamenti Hieronymo interprete ex antiquissima auctoritate in stichos descripta* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1873), 17 [Genesis 20:13].

18. Oscar Gebhardt, ed., *Graecus Venetus* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1875), 35 [Genesis 20:13]. In the case of Genesis 35:7 Graecus Venetus read οἱ θεοὶ as well. *Ibid.*, 71 [Genesis 35:7].

19. Joel Müller, ed., *Masechet Soferim: Der talmudische Traktat der Schreiber* (Leipzig: Hinrichs: 1878), viii [IV, 6].

20. Ludwig Blau, “Soferim,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, ed. Isidore Singer (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalis, 1905), 426-428.

qualifier חול (literally: profane, secular) implied that אלוהים / אלוהים denoted human, angelic or idolatrous agent(s) of power. Thus, the tractate Sofrim did not specify the non-divine denotation of אלוהים / אלוהים wherever it was proposed but rather employed a general label חול which articulated that the LORD was not referred to.

As regards Genesis 20:13, the tractate Sofrim reported that some sages concluded that אלוהים in Genesis 20:13 was non-divine though Rabbi Hanina interpreted it as divine and explained that Genesis 20:13 communicated “if not [i.e., without, apart from] God, they would already have caused me to err.” This vague rendition plausibly implied that God prevented Abraham from being led astray by some unidentified agents (for instance, idols or idolaters). The Jerusalem version of Megillah<sup>21</sup> announced that in the Abraham narrative all appellations, which might be predicated of God, were used in the divine meaning except for Genesis 20:13. Nonetheless, the Jerusalem version of Megillah registered an alternative interpretation according to which אלוהים in Genesis 20:13 was considered divine.

The grand Midrash on Genesis<sup>22</sup> presented three convergent interpretations of Genesis 20:13 which coincided with the Targumic renditions. According to the first interpretation, the nations of the world tried to seduce Abraham when he was still in his father’s house but God was true to him and helped him. According to the second interpretation, the nations of the world tried to beguile Abraham but God revealed himself to Abraham, telling him to leave his father’s house as articulated in Genesis 12:1. According to the third interpretation, the nations of the world tried to divert (תעה) Abraham away from (מ) God’s ways but God placed two great leaders, out of his father’s house (i. e. family), namely, Shem and Eber, to caution the nations against doing that. These three interpretations were recapitulated in the Yalkut Shimoni (ילקוט שמעוני)<sup>23</sup> and they viewed “the people” in more global terms, supposing that the idolatry, with which the world was beset, posed a threat to Abraham’s faith.

The Midrash ליקוט טוב on Genesis 20:13<sup>24</sup> combined the Targumic renditions with three approaches found in the grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis, delivering two interpretations. According to the first interpretation, the nations of the world erred by serving idols but God enlightened Abraham, telling him to leave his father’s house as recorded in Genesis 12:1. According to the second interpretation, when the nations tried to deceive Abraham, God took him out of his father’s house by commanding him to leave that place.

Furthermore, the Midrash שכל טוב composed by Menahem ben Solomon (מנחם בן שלמה)<sup>25</sup> argued that according to Genesis 20:13, God simply took (לקח) Abraham from (מ) his father’s house, and pointed out to Genesis 37:15 where the verb תעה in the Qal

21. תלמוד ירושלמי או תלמוד המערב ויש קורין לו תלמוד ארץ ישראל in “מגילה,” (Vilnius: Romm, 1926-1927), 25 [IX].

22. Julius Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, ed., *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar: Parascha I-XLVII* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1912), 550 [No. 72 פרשה (Genesis 20:13)].

23. “ילקוט בראשית,” in ספר ילקוט שמעוני (Vilnius: Romm, 1863), 78 [No. 91].

24. “ספר בראשית,” in מדרש ליקוט טוב, ed. Salomon Buber (Vilnius: Romm, 1880), 92 [Genesis 20:13].

25. Menahem ben Solomon, “ספר בראשית,” in *Sechel Tob: Kommentar zum ersten und zweiten Buch Mosis*, ed. Salomon Buber (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1900), 48 [Genesis 20:13].

denoted to hang around with no deception involved. On the other hand, מדרש הגדול on Genesis 20:13<sup>26</sup> stated that when idolatrous delusions were misleading (תעו) the whole world, God took (לקח) Abraham from (מ) his father's house by telling him to leave that place as described in Genesis 12:1. Although שכל טוב and מדרש הגדול were alike in the sense that both Midrashim utilised the Hebrew verb לקח, the former Midrash (i.e., that by Menahem ben Solomon) explicated אתי אלהים as "God took me [from my father's house]." This indicated that אלהים denoted God of Israel and the plural form of the verb was induced by the grammatical (plural in terms of parsing) and lexical (expressive of the majesty) features of אלהים. Consequently, the meaning of הִתְעוּ was said to be neutral and corresponding to that of the verb לקח. The latter midrash (i.e., מדרש הגדול) referred to הִתְעוּ, which was equated with the Qal form תעו, to idols, while the verb לקח was added to depict what God did to Abraham as far as his father's house was concerned. Finally, a Midrash penned by En Salomo Astruc (אנשלמה אשתרוק)<sup>27</sup> suggested that some undefined leaders (הדיינין) exiled Abraham from his father's house because Abraham refused to join their idol worship.

Elucidating Genesis 20:13, Saadia Gaon (סעדיה גאון)<sup>28</sup> interpreted אתי אלהים as "God displaced (עקר) me" by virtue of which the divine signification of אלהים and the neutral denotation of הִתְעוּ were recognised. Commenting upon Genesis 20:13, Rashi (רש"י)<sup>29</sup> recalled the Targum Onkelos, yet dissented from its interpretation. Rather, in Rashi's opinion, God was the subject of the verb in the plural (הִתְעוּ) which in this context communicated that "God took me (הוציאני) out of my father's house [...]."

In his commentary on Genesis 20:13<sup>30</sup> and on Joshua 24:19,<sup>31</sup> Rashi explained the plural form of the verb in Genesis 20:13 as the plural of majesty. He observed that אלוהים in itself expressed the authority (שררה), whereas in Hebrew the plural number was instrumental in conveying a sense of majesty. To illustrate his thesis, Rashi referred to Genesis 39:20 (אדני יוסף), 42:30-33 (אדני הארץ) and Exodus 21:29 (בבעליו), 22:14-15 (בעליו) where plural forms of אדון and בעל highlighted human authority. Rashi also quoted expressions from Deuteronomy 5:23, 26 (אלהים היים) and 10:17 (ואדני) as indicative of the divine glory. In those verses the forms, which were plural in terms of parsing, denoted single phenomena which was evident from the context and which was supported by the fact that those plural forms functioned as subjects of

---

26. Solomon Schechter, ed., *Midrash Hag-gadol Forming a Collection of Ancient Rabbinic Homilies to the Pentateuch: Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 301 [Genesis 20:13].

27. En Salomo Astruc, *Midr'sche Hatorah: Exegetische Bermerkungen zum Pentateuch und einigen anderen Stellen der Bibel*, ed. Simon Eppenstein (Berlin: Itzkowski, 1899), 32 [Genesis 20:13].

28. Saadia Gaon, "בראשית," in פירוש על התורה ועל נ"ך (London: Gad, 1959-1960), 15 [Genesis 20:13].

29. Berliner, ed., *Raschi: Der Kommentar des Salomo b. Isak über den Pentateuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1905), 40 [Genesis 20:13].

30. Ibid.

31. Rashi, "ספר יהושע," in מקראות גדולות ספר יהושע (Lublin: שניידמעסער, [s. a.]), 168 [Joshua 24:19].

singular verbs. Thus, in Genesis 39:20 the verbs ויקהו and ויתנהו were singular, whereas in Genesis 42:30 and 42:33 אדני הארץ was appositive to the singular noun האיש which was the subject of singular verbs דבר and ויאמר, respectively. In Deuteronomy 10:17 both אלהי האלהים and אדני האדנים were predicated of a singular form of the personal pronoun (הוא) which was appositive to God's very name. Besides, Rashi listed Genesis 21:14 (ותתע), Psalm 119:176 (תעיתי) and Job 38:41 (יתעו), where the verb תעה in the Qal simply denoted "to wander," in order to validate the neutral meaning thereof. Thus, for Rashi, תעה in the Qal signified "to move from one place to another" and in the Hiphil – "to cause someone / something to move from one place to another."

Commenting upon Genesis 20:13, Samuel ben Meir (רשב"ם)<sup>32</sup> maintained that the true God exiled (הגלה) Abraham as described in Genesis 12:1. He also cited the example of Psalm 119:176 (תעיתי) to cast light upon the verb. Analysing Genesis 20:13, Abraham ibn Ezra (אברהם אבן עזרא)<sup>33</sup> contended that God was the subject of the verb (התעו) which in his view could denote in the Qal "to move from one place to another" as exemplified by Genesis 37:15 (תעה). He admitted that in Isaiah 63:17 (תתענו) the verb תעה in the Hiphil referred to the "wandering of heart" though in that passage the action of enticing away in spiritual terms was attributed by the lyrical subject to the LORD.

Examining Genesis 20:13, David Kimhi (רד"ק)<sup>34</sup> confirmed that God was the subject of the verb (התעו) which, according to him, communicated in the Hiphil the idea of being exiled (הגלו). The plural form of the verb Kimhi explained as an accommodation to the linguistic convention of the public that included the non-monotheistic audience. As Kimhi noticed, since the people of that time and place were accustomed to speaking of the Divinity (God or gods) by means of the plural grammatical forms for the sake of majesty, the Tanakh did likewise as evidenced by Joshua 24:19 (אלהים קדשים), Psalm 149:2 (בעשיו) and Job 35:10 (אלוה עשי).

In his commentary on Genesis 20:13, Meyuhas ben Elijah (מייחוס בן אליהו)<sup>35</sup> contended that the LORD was the One who took (הוציא) Abraham out of his father's house. On the other hand, Joseph Bekhor Shor (יוסף בכור שור)<sup>36</sup> wrote that in Genesis 20:13 the LORD separated Abraham from idols by commanding him to leave that place. Thus, in Shor's opinion, God called Abraham to live as a wanderer who, being liberated from idols, could dedicate his life to the LORD alone. Therefore, Shor interpreted התעו אתי אלהים as follows: "other gods [i. e. idols] from my father's house deceived me." Consequently, אלהים was said to denote idols, while the verb (התעו) was explicated in negative terms. Moreover, for Shor, the prepositional phrase מביא אבי

32. Samuel ben Meir, "בראשית," in פירוש התורה, ed. David Rosin (Breslau: שאטלענדער, 1881-1882), 17-18 [Genesis 20:13].

33. Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר בראשית," in ספר בראשית תורה חומשי תורה ספר בראשית (New York: מקראות גדולות חמשה חומשי תורה ספר בראשית, 1970-1971), 241 [Genesis 20:13].

34. Kimhi, "פירוש רד"ק," in מקראות גדולות חומשי בית דוד, vol. 1 (Lemberg: Balaban, 1909), 175r-175v [Genesis 20:13].

35. Meyuhas ben Elijah, "Genesis," in *The Commentary on the Pentateuch*, ed. Albert William Greenup and Charles Henry Titterton (London: [s. n.], 1909), 56 [Genesis 20:13].

36. Joseph Bekhor Shor, "ספר בראשית," in *Kommentar zum Pentateuch*, vol. 1, ed. Adolph Jellinek (Leipzig: Gerhard, 1856), 31 [Genesis 20:13].

modified not the verb but rather the noun (אלהים), identifying the source / origin thereof (“idols [stemming] from my father’s house”).

Studying Genesis 20:13, Bahya ben Asher (בהיי בן אשר)<sup>37</sup> opined that since in his father’s house Abraham felt compelled to worship idols, he had to leave that place to serve the LORD alone. In his commentary on Genesis 20:13 Jacob ben Asher (יעקב בן אשר),<sup>38</sup> who was also called בעל הטורים, observed that since idolaters from the house of Abraham’s father put pressure on Abraham to follow their gods, Abraham decided to leave his father’s house and to live as a wanderer in order to stay away from idols and with the intention of worshipping true God alone.

From Genesis 20:13 Gersonides (רלב"ג)<sup>39</sup> inferred that the LORD exiled (הגלה) Abraham from his father’s house, namely, took (הוציא) him out of that place. Aaron ben Elijah (אהרון בן אליהו)<sup>40</sup> denied that in Genesis 20:13 אלהים could denote idols because God was the One who in Genesis 12:1 told Abraham to leave his land. Rather, Aaron preferred to explain that the plural form of the verb (התעו) was the plural of majesty, which was typical of God and natural in the context of God’s generic name (אלוהים) that was plural in terms of parsing. To illustrate this thesis, he cited the example of Genesis 35:7 (נגלו) and Joshua 24:19 (אלהים קדשים). The verb itself, according to Aaron, denoted in the Qal to hang around as attested in Genesis 37:15, while in the Hiphil - to move someone or something from one place to another. In Aaron’s opinion, the prepositional phrase מביט אבי modified the verb (התעו) by identifying from where God moved Abraham, not the noun (אלהים) which would put an idolatrous construction on אלהים.

Working on Genesis 20:13, Abraham Saba (אברהם סבע)<sup>41</sup> argued that Abraham destroyed idols in his father’s house and therefore was banished (השליך) from that place. Thus, Abraham roamed and wandered, fulfilling the will of his Creator. Consequently, Saba interpreted אלהים as idols on account of which Abraham was exiled from his father’s house when he dared to demolish them. Expounding Genesis 20:13, Obadiah Sforno (עובדיה ספורנו)<sup>42</sup> reasoned that because of the idol worship, which Abraham could not bear, he felt compelled to leave his father’s house and to live as a wanderer. Therefore, it seems that Sforno viewed אלהים as idols and construed the verb (התעו) as denoting a sort of displacement.

37. Bahya ben Asher, “ספר בראשית,” באור על התורה, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Bomberg, 1852), 65v [Genesis 20:13].

38. Jacob ben Asher, פירוש על התורה (Warsaw: זיסבערג, 1880), 38 [Genesis 20:13].

39. Gersonides, “בראשית,” in פירוש על התורה על דרך ביאור (Venice: Bomberg, 1546-1547), 29r [Genesis 20:13].

40. Aaron ben Elijah, “ספר בראשית,” in ספר חת תורה, ed. Abraham Firkovich (Eupatoria: Firkovich, 1866), 53r-53v [Genesis 20:13].

41. Abraham Saba, “ספר בראשית,” in ספר צרור המור (Warsaw: Walden, 1879), 44 [Genesis 20:13].

42. Obadiah Sforno, “בראשית,” in באור יקר ונחמד על חמשה חומשי תורה (Warsaw: Syporne, 1856), 13r [Genesis 20:13].

#### 4. Christian Exegesis of Genesis 20:13

Since ancient<sup>43</sup> and mediaeval<sup>44</sup> church fathers relied on the Septuagint or on the Vulgate, which were free of the challenge presented by the Hebrew original of Genesis 20:13, they did not see any difficulty. Therefore, the patristic and mediaeval Christian exegesis made no Trinitarian claims to the plural form of the verb occurring with אלהים in Genesis 20:13.

It appears that Martin Luther was one of the first expositors who embarked on the Trinitarian interpretation of אלהים אהי אלהים from Genesis 20:13 albeit in 1529 Agostino Steuco<sup>45</sup> mentioned the possibility of the Trinitarian reading of that verse. In Luther's sermons on Genesis 20:13 from 1523<sup>46</sup> and from 1527<sup>47</sup> no trace of the Trinitarian exposition was found. Similarly, the Wittenberg Vulgate,<sup>48</sup> which was a revision of some parts of the Vulgate arranged primarily by Luther and published in 1529, conformed to the received text of the Vulgate as far as Genesis 20:13a is concerned.

In his lectures on the Book of Genesis (1535-1545) Luther<sup>49</sup> realised that אלהים acted the subject of the verb in the plural (התעו). He admitted that the fact, that אלהים itself was plural in terms of parsing, could be explained as the plural of majesty which was the standard Jewish approach, yet, in Luther's opinion, אלהים occurring with plural verbal or nominal forms proved the presence of the Trinitarian concept<sup>50</sup> in the Hebrew Bible. Luther insisted that Jewish readers of the Tanakh intentionally denied this concept which he also projected into the plural forms attested in Genesis 1:26. Expounding the verb, Luther maintained that תעה in the Qal denoted to stray, while in the Hiphil - to make someone or something stray. Consequently, Luther presumed that Abraham ventured to say that without God's injunction he would prefer to stay in his father's house but God, who revealed himself as the Father, the Son and the Spirit,

43. As exemplified by: Joannes Chrysostomus, "Homilia XLV," in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 54, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1862), 419-420 [4 (Genesis 20:13)]; Procopius Gazaesus, "Commentarius in Genesim," in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*, vol. 87/1, ed. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1865), 381-382 [Genesis 20:13].

44. As exemplified by: Nicolaus de Lyra, "Genesis," in *Biblia sacra cum glossis interlineari et ordinaria*, vol. 1 (Lyons: Vincent, 1545), 75r [Genesis 20:13]; Dionysius Carthusianus, "In Genesim enarratio," in *Enarrationes piae ac eruditae in Quinque Mosaicae Legis Libros* (Cologne: Quentel, 1548), 173 [Genesis 20:13].

45. Agostino Steuco, *Recognitio Veteris Testamenti ad Hebraicam veritatem* (Venice: Aldus, 1529), 71r [Genesis 20:13].

46. Martin Luther, "Predigten über das erste Buch Mose gehalten 1523/24 (15. November 1523)," in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1895), 293 [Genesis 20:13].

47. Luther, "In Genesim Declamationes (1527)," in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 24 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1900), 366 [Genesis 20:13].

48. "Text der Vulgata-Revision von 1529," in Luther, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Die Deutsche Bibel)*, vol. 5 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1914), 33 [Genesis 20:13].

49. Luther, "Vorlesungen über 1. Mose (1535-1545)," in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 43 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912), 128-129 [Genesis 20:13].

50. Speaking of the Trinitarian concept in the Scripture, Luther equated it with the mature, patristic concept of the Trinity.

told him to leave that place and thus made him stray. The causative force of הַתְּעוּ was accentuated in Luther's German Bible<sup>51</sup> where Genesis 20:13a was translated as follows: "God commanded me to walk away from my father's house." Compared with the LXX and the Vulgate, which portrayed God as the One who took or led Abraham out of his father's house, exegetes of the first half of the sixteenth century<sup>52</sup> highlighted the causative force of הַתְּעוּ and articulated that God was the One who caused Abraham to leave that place.

In his annotated translation of the Hebrew Bible Sebastian Münster<sup>53</sup> noticed that although אֱלֹהִים was plural in terms of parsing, it seldom occurred with plural verbal forms. In the edition of 1546 Münster added the quotation from the Targum Onkelos to Genesis 20:13. In 1536 Konrad Pellikan<sup>54</sup> observed that אֱלֹהִים was the subject of the plural form of the verb and he alleged that אֱלֹהִים stood neither for a single Godhead<sup>55</sup> nor for many gods but rather for the Trinity. Consequently, in Pellikan's opinion, the passages, in which אֱלֹהִים occurred with plural forms, revealed the plurality within the Divinity, whereas the passages in which אֱלֹהִים occurred within singular forms safeguarded God's unity.

Commenting upon Genesis 20:13, John Calvin<sup>56</sup> acknowledged the exegetical challenge and considered the Trinitarian exposition to be far-fetched in the context of that passage. Calvin proposed that in the Tanakh אֱלֹהִים occurring with singular forms referred to the LORD, while אֱלֹהִים - with plural forms might denote non-divine agents of power such as angels or earthly rulers / leaders. From the contemporary perspective it seems that Calvin overstated the case because אֱלֹהִים might denote either the LORD or other agents of power irrespective of whether singular or plural forms were occurring with it. Although the angelic interpretation of Genesis 20:13 was not widespread in the Jewish exegesis, it would lie within the ambit of the Jewish tradition

51. Luther, trans., "Das Alte Testament (1523)," in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Die Deutsche Bibel)*, vol. 8 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1954), 90 [Genesis 20:13]. Idem, trans., "Bibel (1545)," in *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Die Deutsche Bibel)*, vol. 8, 91 [Genesis 20:13]. In the final version of the German Bible (1545) Luther annotated the verb "to wander" (German: wandern) in Genesis 20:13, writing that God himself commanded Abraham to stray.

52. Sante Pagnini, ed. and trans., *Biblia* (Leiden: Ry, 1528), 6v [Genesis 20:13]. Idem, ed. and trans., *Biblia* (Lyon: Porte, 1542), 4v [Genesis 20:13]. Sebastian Münster, ed. and trans., *Hebraica Biblia*, vol. 1 (Basel: Isingrin and Petri, 1534), 17v [Genesis 20:13]. Konrad Pellikan, *Commentaria bibliorum*, vol. 1 (Zurich: Froschauer, 1536), 25v [Genesis 20:13].

53. Münster, ed. and trans., *Hebraica Biblia*, vol. 1 (Basel: Isingrin and Petri, 1534), 17v (n. "d") [Genesis 20:13]. Idem, ed. and trans., *Hebraica Biblia*, vol. 1 (Basel: Isingrin and Petri, 1546), 42 (n. "d") [Genesis 20:13].

54. Pellikan, *Commentaria*, vol. 1, 25v [Genesis 20:13].

55. By this Pellikan understood the concept of absolutely undifferentiated Divinity (אל המיוחד) which was characteristic of Rabbinic Judaism.

56. Jean Calvin, "Commentarius in Genesisin," in *Opera quae supersunt omnia (Corpus Reformatorum)*, vol. 23 (51), ed. Wilhelm Baum, Edouard Cunitz and Eduard Reuss (Braunschweig: Schwetschke, 1882), 293 [Genesis 20:13]. Calvin's exposition was recapitulated in an annotated Latin translation of the Bible which was edited by Robertus Stephanus (Robert Estienne). Robertus Stephanus, ed., *Biblia utriusque Testamenti* (Geneva: Stephanus, 1557), 18v [Genesis 20:13].

which often resorted to angels, dealing with such plural forms (see Gen. 1:26, 11:7, 35:7).

In Genesis 20:13 Calvin translated אלהים as angels and he also mentioned another interpretation according to which Abraham referred to true God, yet accommodated his phrasing to his interlocutor who did not believe in one God of the Covenant. This explanation was propounded by Kimhi<sup>57</sup> but Calvin disfavoured it for theological reasons as undermining Abraham's testimony to the LORD as the only God. Calvin explicated the verb תעה in neutral terms, asserting that it expressed a simple action of moving in the Qal and of leading in the Hiphil. Therefore, the angels, that acted towards Abraham, did not deceive him but rather guided him on the LORD's behalf. Thus, for Calvin, God used his angels to lead Abraham out of his father's house.

Finally, it must be remembered that Hebrew-Latin lexica of the first half of the sixteenth century<sup>58</sup> elucidated the use of the verb תעה in the Hebrew Bible, pointing out the negative meaning thereof, particularly, in the Hiphil. As a matter of fact, the examination of all biblical loci, in which תעה was used in the Hiphil,<sup>59</sup> proves that notwithstanding the possible neutral denotation in the Qal, this verb in the Hiphil always conveyed a sense of deception and vice. Actually, Hebrew-Latin dictionaries of that time were based on Hebrew lexica produced by the Jewish Hebrew scholarship, particularly, on Kimhi's<sup>60</sup> monumental dictionary called ספר השרשים. Hebrew lexica by Kimhi<sup>61</sup> and by Solomon Parhon (שלמה פרחון)<sup>62</sup> failed to validate the neutral denotation of תעה in the Hiphil.

## Conclusion

The Jewish exegetical tradition tried two basic approaches to Genesis 20:13. The first approach took the negative meaning of the verb תעה in the Hiphil at face value and therefore disallowed the divine denotation of אלהים in that verse. Consequently, אלהים must refer either to idols or to leaders, while preference was given to the former.

57. Kimhi, "פירוש רד"ק," 175r-175v [Genesis 20:13].

58. "תעה," in *Vocabularium Hebraicum atque Chaldaicum totius Veteris Testamenti* (Alcala: In Academia Complutensi, 1515), 171r-171v. Johann Reuchlin, *Principium libri: De rudimentis Hebraicis* (Pforzheim: Anshelm, 1506), 541 [s. v. תעה]. Idem, ed., *Lexicon Hebraicum* (Basel: Petri, 1537), 417 [s. v. תעה]. Sebastian Münster, ed., *Dictionarium Hebraicum* (Basel: Froben, 1523), 521 [s. v. תעה]. Idem, ed., *Dictionarium Hebraicum ex Rabbinorum commentariis collectum* (Basel: Froben, 1525), Z3r-Z3v [s. v. תעה]. Sante Pagnini, ed., *Thesaurus linguae sanctae* (Lyon: Gryphius, 1529), 2742-2744 [s. v. תעה]. Idem, ed. and trans., *Thesaurus linguae sanctae ex R. David Kimchi ספר השרשים* (Paris: Stephanus, 1548), 1490 [s. v. תעה].

59. Namely: 2 Kings 21:9; Isaiah 3:12, 9:15, 19:13-14, 30:28, 63:17; Jeremiah 23:13, 23:32, 42:20, 50:6; Hosea 4:12; Amos 2:4; Micah 3:5; Psalm 107:40; Job 12:24-25; Proverbs 10:17, 12:26; 2 Chronicles 33:9. Gerhard Lisowsky, ed., *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981), 1525-1526 [s. v. תעה].

60. Kimhi, *Radicum liber sive Hebraeum bibliorum lexicon*, ed. Johann Heinrich Raphael Biesenthal and Fürchtegott Lebrecht (Berlin: Bethge, 1847).

61 Ibid., 414 [s. v. תעה].

62. Solomon Parhon, *Lexicon Hebraicum*, vol. 2, ed. Salomo Gottlieb Stern (Pressburg [Bratislava]: Schmid, 1844), 74v [s. v. תעה].

In the second approach the neutral meaning of the verb תעה in the Hiphil was presumed and thus אלהים was said to denote the LORD. Accordingly, the plural form of the verb was construed as the plural of the majesty. Since the neutral denotation of the verb in the Hiphil could not be established on the basis of biblical passages, it was argued that the meaning of the verb in the Hiphil must be a causative reflexion of the meaning thereof in the Qal. Given that תעה in the Qal could communicate moving from one place to another, the possible, neutral denotation thereof in the Hiphil was deduced.

The Christian reading of Genesis 20:13 in antiquity and in the Middle Ages was conditioned by the translations, through which the church accessed the Tanakh, namely, by the Septuagint and the Vulgate. Until the Age of the Reformation no Trinitarian claim was laid to the plural form of the verb הָתַעַז which occurred with אלהים, while such a claim did not help to understand this passage within the compass of the Hebrew Scriptures.