ABRAHAM HALEVI’S COMPREHENSIVE ON THE GENERIC NAME OF GOD IN THE TANAKH

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Abstract
The present article analyses the study of the grammatical and lexical features of God’s generic name contained in the classic Jewish compendium authored by Abraham ben Daud Halevi and situates it against the disquisitions of Judah Halevi, Maimonides and Joseph Albo. These mediaeval compendia were comprehensive presentations of the Jewish tradition devised as instruments for cultivating the Jewish identity. In the Hebrew Bible both אלהים and 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. Therefore, this topic merited examination within the framework of the Jewish tradition.

Key Words: Generic Name of God; History of Hebrew Grammar; History of Hebrew Lexicography; Abraham ben Daud Halevi; Judah Halevi; Maimonides; Joseph Albo

Historical and Theological Context
God’s generic name (אלוהי, אלוהים) was studied in the Jewish tradition for various reasons. Firstly, both אלהים and 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, אלהים might stand for the object of worship (true God versus false god[s]), for intermediaries between God and humankind (angels) and for religious or social leaders. Actually, in some passages (e.g. Exod. 4:16, 7:1; Exod. 22:27/28; Ps. 82:1-6) it was impossible to interpret אלהים as denoting true God or false gods without undermining the tenets of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, even the ancient Christian theologians, who were not proficient in Hebrew but rather relied on the Septuagint, on the Vulgate or on the Peshitta, had to explicate those passages in the light of their context and they felt compelled to recognise non-divine denotations of אלהים.

Secondly, regardless of its specific meaning, אלהים at times occurred with plural verbal, adjectival, participial, pronominal or imperatival forms in the Tanakh. Grammatical features of אלהים, which in terms of parsing was a plural form of the singular אלהי, אלהים, merited examination because from the perspective of the Jewish tradition, the Scripture must be expounded in accordance with the concept of the absolute unity of God, while any

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1 In the historical setting of the Hebrew Bible it is better to speak of religious and social leaders.
interpretation which might compromise or challenge this concept, deserved to be dismissed. As regards the plural grammatical forms connected with אלהים, Philo of Alexandria3 studied them out of exegetical curiosity, whereas the Babylonian Talmud4 did it more for apologetic reasons.

Thirdly, unlike God’s very name (אֱלֹהִים), which was unique and which was predicated only of God of Israel, אלָהֵי was the most generic name of God among all divine appellations attested in the Tanakh.5 Therefore, Jewish sages attempted to explore this name to understand how the Scripture spoke of the Divinity as revealed to human beings and as thought of by human beings. Consequently, by delving into the meaning and function of the generic name of God in Hebrew, the Jewish tradition intended to fathom some attributes of the Godhead as depicted in the Tanakh.

God’s generic name was examined in the classic Jewish lexica,6 grammars7 and biblical commentaries (especially those on Gen. 1:1 where אלהים surfaced for the first time)8 which were produced in the Middle Ages. The present article analyses the study of the grammatical and lexical features of God’s generic name contained in the classic Jewish compendium authored by Abraham ben Daud Halevi and situates it against the disquisitions of Judah Halevi, Maimonides and Joseph Albo. These mediaeval compendia were comprehensive presentations of the Jewish tradition devised as instruments for cultivating the Jewish identity. Given that the literature both on the origin of the Jewish Hebrew scholarship9 and on the generic name of God10 is vast, the present article is preoccupied

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7 Solomon Parhon (Lyck: Schmid, 1844), 4v [s. v. אלהים].


with the primary sources, namely, with the aforementioned compendia, and it analyses the biblical passages, which were adduced there with reference to the meaning and use of אֱלֹהִים, in the light of the Jewish exegetical tradition.

The present essay is structured after four classic, Jewish, mediaeval compendia authored by Abraham ben Daud Halevi, Judah Halevi, Maimonides and Joseph Albo. Those compendia to varying degrees examined grammatical and lexical features of God’s generic name in the Tanakh and they evoked various biblical passages which in the present article were analysed in the context of the Jewish exegetical tradition. It should be noted that the emphasis was put on Abraham Halevi’s compendium because it treated extensively of this subject matter. From the theological point of view, the present article aims to discover the trajectory of meaning related to the generic name of God as it emerged within the framework of the Jewish tradition which, in this essay, is considered to be the most natural context for interpreting the Tanakh.

Abraham ben Daud Halevi on אֱלֹהִים/אֱלֹהִים

In his compendium Abraham ben Daud Halevi studied the signification and use of אֱלֹהִים which stemmed from לא conveying a sense of power and ability. Consequently, he asserted that אֱלֹהִים was plural in terms of parsing and that such a use of the plural number was intended to amplify the feature(s) of a noun (דהות). Since לא originated from אֱלֹהִים, it communicated the idea of strength (חזק), majesty (נשיה), and reign (влад). To illustrate his thesis, Abraham ben Daud Halevi referred to Deut. 10:17, Josh. 22:22, Ps. 88:5 (אֱלֹהִים) and Dan. 11:36 (אֱלֹהִים).

Deuteronomy 10:17 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

According to Abraham ben Daud Halevi, in Hebrew the plural number was one of the linguistic means of amplifying certain feature(s). In Deut. 10:17 (אֱלֹהִים ואדני אֱלֹהִים) a sample of the typical Hebrew superlative was found. In Hebrew the superlative is modelled on “the X of [all] Xs” (e.g. the master of all masters = master supreme). Formally speaking,Accent in Deut. 10:17 was the construct state of a plural form of the noun אֱלֹהִים albeit the


11 Abraham ben Daud Halevi, Das Buch, 19-20 (Hebrew text) [I, V]. Ibidem, 83-93 (Hebrew text) [II, VI, I].
Samaritan text\textsuperscript{12} read אדני as singular. The Septuagint\textsuperscript{13} and the Targumim\textsuperscript{14} construed אדני as singular. Moreover, the LXX translated אלהים as “God of gods” (θεοὶ τῶν θεῶν) and אלהי as “Lord of lords” (κύριοι τῶν κυρίων).\textsuperscript{15} The Targum Onkelos interpreted אלהים as “God of leaders” (אלים ראשי) and אלהי as the “master of kings” (רמי מלך). Such a rendition obviated the danger that readers might suppose that the LORD was god-in-chief in the midst of other gods or lord-in-chief in the midst of lords.

Philo\textsuperscript{16} touched upon Deut. 10:17, operating however with the Greek rendition (βασιλεὺς τῶν θεῶν) different from the LXX. For Philo, the expression “king of gods” (βασιλεὺς τῶν θεῶν), which in his tract stood for the Hebrew אלהים, indicated that God as the absolute Ruler of the universe was to be distinguished from the phenomena (such as the Sun or the Moon) which were subordinate to him and which human beings dared to call ‘gods’ on account of their splendour.

Commenting upon Gen. 20:13\textsuperscript{17} and Josh. 24:19,\textsuperscript{18} Rashi (רש”י) observed that אלהים in itself expressed the authority (רשד), whereas in Hebrew the plural number was instrumental in conveying a sense of majesty. To illustrate his thesis, Rashi referred to Gen. 39:20 (אברהם ויקח), 42:30-33 (אבתו האחים) and Exod. 21:29 (במשלי), 22:14 (בさてל) where the plural forms of אלהים and אלהי highlighted human authority. Rashi also cited expressions from Deut. 5:23/26 (הארץ יהוה) and 10:17 (האדנים יהוה) 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 singular verbs. Thus, in Gen. 39:20 the verbs והכנס and היווה were singular, whereas in Gen. 42:30 and 42:33 אלכין האון was appositive to the singular noun יהוה which was the subject of singular verbs and יהוה, respectively. In Deut. 10:17 both אדני והאדנים and אלהי והאדנים were predicative of a singular form of the personal pronoun יהוה which was appositive to God’s very name.

Abraham ibn Ezra (אברהם אבינו)\textsuperscript{19} examined Deut. 10:17 in his commentary on Gen. 1:1,\textsuperscript{20} saying that אלהי and אלהים were attested to in Deut. 10:17 was synonymous with the expression “God of hosts” (אלוהי ובהלו) found in Hos 12:6 and in Amos 3:13; 6:14, while both phrases denoted “God of angels”. In Abraham’s opinion, human beings, who were tasked with dispensing justice, could also be called אלהים, namely, judges because they stood proxy for God who was thought of as the chief Judge. Similarly, in his commentary on Deut. 10:17 Nahmanides (נמנים)\textsuperscript{21} contended that אלהים והאדנים – the host of heaven in the expressions אלהי והאדנים and אלהי והאדנים, respectively.

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\textsuperscript{12} Benjamin Blayne, ed., Pentateuchus Hebraeo-Samaritanus (Oxford: Clarendon, 1790), 472 [Deut. 10:17].
\textsuperscript{13} Henry Barclay Swete, ed., The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887), 364 [Deut. 10:17].
\textsuperscript{14} Berliner, ed., Targum Onkelos, vol. 1 (Berlin: Kauffmann, 1884), 206 [Deut. 10:17]. Adolf Brüll, ed., Das samaritanische Targum zum Pentateuch (Frankfurt am Main: Erras, 1875), 219 [Deut. 10:17].
\textsuperscript{15} The same strategy of interpretation was adopted in the Samaritan Targum.
\textsuperscript{17} Berliner, ed., Raschi, 40 [Gen. 20:13].
\textsuperscript{18} Rashi, “משלי,” in מקראות גדולות חמשה חומשי תורה ספר דברים, (Lublin: ספרי תנך ודברי תורה, [s. a.]), 168 [Josh. 24:19].
\textsuperscript{20} Abraham ibn Ezra, “משלי,” in מקראות גדולות חמשה חומשי תורה ספר דברי תורה, 130 [Deut. 10:16-17].
\textsuperscript{21} Nahmanides, “משלי,” in מקראות גדולות חמשה חומשי תורה ספר דברי תורה, 130 [Deut. 10:16-17].
Joshua 22:22 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Josh. 22:22 (אֶלֶה יְיָ), various names of God were tied together and a sequence אֶלֶה יְיָ occurred there twice. As regards Josh. 22:22, the Septuagint\(^\text{22}\) translated the first occurrence of that sequence as a predicative sentence (ὁ θεὸς θεός ἐστιν κύριος) in which אלוהים was construed as an emphatic apposition to אֶל, while the second occurrence thereof was rendered purely emphatically (ὁ θεὸς θεός αὐτὸς). On the other hand, Aquila’s and Symmachus’ versions\(^\text{23}\) interpreted אלוהים as ἰσχυρὸς θεός, thus highlighting the generic meaning of אל. The Targum\(^\text{24}\) to Josh. 22:22 retained the Hebrew original as far as the aforementioned sequence was concerned.

The grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis\(^\text{25}\) explained that three appellations found in Josh. 22:22 (אֶלֶה יְיָ) were intended to reveal the majesty of one and the same God from every angle without undermining his absolute unity which was secured by a singular apposition. Indeed, a singular form of the personal pronoun (הוא)\(^\text{26}\) and a singular form of the participle (יָדָע, namely, “the One who knows”) (אֶל יָדָע), were appositive to אלוהים which occurred twice in Josh. 22:22. Moreover, the Midrash discussed Josh. 22:22 in connection with Josh. 24:19 (אלוהים קדשים) where God’s generic name was modified by a plural form of the adjective (קדשים). This fact, according to the Midrash, was exploited by those who ventured to challenge the concept of the absolute unity of God. From the perspective of the Midrash, the unity of the Godhead was fortified within the purview of Josh. 24:19 because in the words following אלוהים קדשים, the latter was referred to not as ‘they’ [i.e. gods] (קדשים) but rather as ‘he’ [i.e. God] (יהוה).

Commenting upon Josh. 22:22, Rashi\(^\text{28}\) remarked that in the aforementioned passage אלוהים יי signified the LORD who was God of all אלוהים, plausibly, of all angels (אל כל אלוהים). In his commentary on the same verse Kimhi\(^\text{29}\) interpreted אלוהים יי as typical of the superlative constructions which in Hebrew were patterned on “the X of [all] Xs”. For instance, in Hebrew the king of kings meant king supreme, whereas the lord of lords meant lord supreme. Therefore, for Kimhi, אלוהים יי occurring in Josh. 22:22 denoted the LORD who was the King of kings (מלכי מלכים) and God of angels given that in אלוהים Kimhi explicated אל as God, while אלוהים signifies angels (המלאכים).

Psalms 88:5 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Ps. 88:5 (אֶלֶה יְיָ) Abraham ben Daud Halevi contended that אלוהים should be derived from אל который conveyed a sense of might, strength and power. The Septuagint\(^\text{30}\) translated אל as helpless or powerless (ἀβοήθητος) which implies that the LXX interpreters construed אל as powerful.


\(^{26}\) Not the plural one (הם).

\(^{27}\) Not the plural one (ידעים).

\(^{28}\) Rashi, “ספר יהושע,” 155 [Josh. 22:22].

\(^{29}\) Kimhi, “ספר יהושע,” 155 [Josh. 22:22].

\(^{30}\) Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 329 [Ps. 88:5/LXX 87:6].
as לא in its most rudimentary denotation. Symmachus’ version\textsuperscript{31} rendered by means of the adverbal participle οὐκ ἰσχύων (without/not being strong). This translation also indicated that לא was interpreted in terms of might, strength and power. The Targum\textsuperscript{32} to Ps. 88:5 and the Midrash\textsuperscript{33} on Ps. 88:5 read לא as the same way. Commenting upon Ps. 88:5, Rashi\textsuperscript{34} associated from Ps. 88:5, אילים from Ps. 22:20\textsuperscript{35} and לא from Gen. 31:29\textsuperscript{36} with לא conveying a sense of might, strength and power. In their commentaries on Ps. 88:5 Kimhi\textsuperscript{37} and Abraham ibn Ezra\textsuperscript{38} equated with הַיָּדוֹ (power) and אָנָּיו (stamina).

Daniel 11:36 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Dan. 11:36 spoke of a king blaspheming against the very God (אלהים לא). Obviously, the expressions לע על לא על כל על לא were parallel to one another. According to Abraham ben Daud Halevi, constructions such as לא על לא על לא על כל על לא were accentuated God’s majesty by picturing God as the One who was not supreme, namely, the One who was the power of all powers. The Greek versions\textsuperscript{39} translatedعال של לא as “against the very God”, while לע על לא על – as “against God of gods”. Commenting upon Dan. 11:36, Saadia Gaon (ר"סא)\textsuperscript{40} and Abraham ibn Ezra\textsuperscript{41} identified לא על לא is equivalent to the LORD.

Abraham ben Daud Halevi on Particular Denotations of ג上がו/אלהים

Furthermore, Abraham ben Daud Halevi observed that in some passages акהלים denoted not God but the angel(s) or leader(s) representing God in the world. Thus, he adduced the following loci as proof of the non-divine denotations of акהלים/אלהים: Gen. 6:2-4 (notable persons); Gen. 48:15-16 (angel); Exod. 12:12 (idol[s]); Exod. 22:8 (leader[s]); Judg. 11:24, 16:23, 17:5, 18:24 (idol[s]); Ezek. 17:13 (strongmen of the land); Ps. 82:6-7 (the wise); Ps. 88:5 (a sense of power); Job 38:7 (celestial bodies).

Genesis 6:2-4 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Abraham ben Daud Halevi interpreted from Gen. 6:2-4 as “notable persons” (הָדַעַת חֶסֶד) which was consisted with the Jewish exegetical tradition. In Gen. 6:2 the Septuagint\textsuperscript{42} translated על but the angel(s) or leader(s) representing God in the world. Thus, he adduced the following loci as proof of the non-divine denotations of акהלים/אלהים: Gen. 6:2-4 (notable persons); Gen. 48:15-16 (angel); Exod. 12:12 (idol[s]); Exod. 22:8 (leader[s]); Judg. 11:24, 16:23, 17:5, 18:24 (idol[s]); Ezek. 17:13 (strongmen of the land); Ps. 82:6-7 (the wise); Ps. 88:5 (a sense of power); Job 38:7 (celestial bodies).


\textsuperscript{34} Rashi, in \textit{Testamentum fragmenta}, vol. 7, ed. Brian Walton (London: Roycroft, 1656), 226 [Ps. 88:5].

\textsuperscript{35} Ibidem, 64 [Gen. 11:29].

\textsuperscript{36} Berliner, ed., \textit{Raschi, 64} [Gen. 31:29].

\textsuperscript{37} Kimhi, in \textit{Testamentum fragmenta}, vol. 7, ed. Brian Walton (London: Roycroft, 1656), 226 [Ps. 88:5].

\textsuperscript{38} Abraham ibn Ezra, “םלועה חפיים,” in \textit{םלועה חפיים}, 338 [Ps. 88:5].

\textsuperscript{39} Swete, ed., \textit{The Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint}, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), 570 [Dan. 11:36 (LXX)].

\textsuperscript{40} Saadia Gaon, in \textit{Testamentum fragmenta}, vol. 7, ed. Brian Walton (London: Roycroft, 1656), 226 [Ps. 88:5].

\textsuperscript{41} Abraham ibn Ezra, “םלועה חפיים,” in \textit{םלועה חפיים}, 338 [Ps. 88:5].

\textsuperscript{42} Swete, ed., \textit{The Old Testament}, vol. 1, 9 [Gen. 6:2-4].

\textsuperscript{43} Field, ed., \textit{Origenis}, vol. 1, 22 [Gen. 6:2/3 (LXX)].

\textsuperscript{44} Swete, ed., \textit{The Old Testament}, vol. 1, 9 [Gen. 6:2-4].
Aquilla’s version\(^{46}\) proposed “sons of gods” (οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν θεῶν). Symmachus’ revision\(^{47}\) explicated מנהיגים from Gen. 6:2 as the “sons of the mighty” (οἱ υἱοὶ τῶν δυναστευόντων). In Gen. 6:2 and 6:4 the Targum Onkelos\(^{48}\) interpreted בני האלֵים as “sons of leaders” (בני האלהים), while the Samaritan Targum\(^{49}\) offers “sons of rulers” (בני שלטניה).

The grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis\(^{50}\) mentioned that a 2nd-century sage, Simeon bar Yochai (סימון בן יוחאי), interpreted בני האלהים and בני השופטים as “sons of judges” (ורעים (ובניהם), condemnation anyone who would dare to speak of “sons of God” (בני אלֵים) in the literal sense as if the LORD could ever sire anyone. Similarly, Yalkut Shimon\(^{51}\) suggested that בני האלֵים were “sons of judges”.\(^{51}\) Pirke attributed to Rabbi Eliezer\(^{52}\) drew on the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan\(^{53}\) which in Gen. 6:4 identified בני השופטים with two angels who were said to fall from heaven and to get involved with the daughters of men. The Pirke elaborated upon this subject, assuming that in Gen. 6:2-4 בני השופטים and בני האלֵים were identical with those fallen angels. However, from the exegetical point of view, it is debatable whether in that narrative בני האלֵים and בני השופטים were synonymous. The same Pirke affirmed that in the Scripture the expression בני האלֵים regularly denoted either Israelites as God’s children (e.g. Deut. 14:1) or God’s angels.

Saadia Gaon\(^{54}\) construed בני האלֵים in Gen. 6:2-4 as “sons of nobles (אוטילים).” Rashi\(^{55}\) interpreted בני האלֵים (הכוהנים) and leaders (השופטים) denoted God (تعريف מַר) with reference to God or with reference to human or angelic beings. In his commentary on Gen. 6:2-4 Abraham ibn Ezra\(^{56}\) distinguished three traditional interpretations of בני האלֵים and propounded his own exposition as well. According to the first interpretation, בני האלֵים were sons of leaders (הכוהנים) who were meting out God’s justice in the world. According to the second interpretation, in Gen. 6:2-4 אלהים denoted the LORD himself and therefore בני האלֵים were the LORD’s children, namely, those who were living a holy life on earth as typified by Deut. 14:1. The third interpretation presupposed that בני האלֵים were sons of Seth, whereas the daughters of men came from Cain’s family. According to the interpretation invented by Abraham ibn Ezra, בני האלֵים were those men who had insights into the divine and who by virtue of such a supernal knowledge could find women that were a perfect fit for them and that gave birth to heroes (מבירים).

**Genesis 48:15-16 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi**

Since in Gen. 48:15-16 בני האלֵים was appositive to_ACTION_NAME_ in Gen. 48:15 בני האלֵים denoted God’s angel, and he opined that God was on a regular basis employing his angels to deal with human beings. Therefore, in his view, the

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45 Field, ed., *Origenis*, vol. 1, 22 [Gen. 6:2/3 (Theodotion)].
46 Ibidem, [Gen. 6:2/3 (Aquila)].
47 Ibidem, [Gen. 6:2/3 (Symmachus)].
48 Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 6 [Gen. 6:2-4].
49 Brüll, ed., *Das samaritanische*, 6-7 [Gen. 6:2-4].
50 Theodor and Albeck, ed., *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar: Parasha I-XLVII*, 247-248 [No. 26 (משנה), (Gen. 6:2-4)].
51 Saadia Gaon, “ספר ולקוט משמעון,” in *משנה*, (Vilnius: Romm, 1863), 36 [No. 43].
narratives about God engaging humankind would freely switch between God and his angel(s). The LXX\textsuperscript{57} translated הַאֲלָהִים in Gen. 48:15 as κύριος (the LORD), while in Gen. 48:16 as ἄγγελος (an angel). The Targum Onkelos\textsuperscript{58} rendered הַאֲלָהִים in Gen. 48:15 by means of God’s very name, while הַמַּלֵּךְ (the king) from Gen. 48:16 was interpreted as an angel.

Philo\textsuperscript{59} elaborated upon Gen. 48:15-16, juxtaposing this locus with Gen. 11:7 and sharing his philosophical concerns. In his view, God was the cause (source) of good only and his attitude towards humankind was always benevolent. Therefore, God could not directly relate to evil but rather must be absolutely insulated from evil and from evil forces. Thus, God was compelled to use his proxies to carry out his judgment albeit God’s disciplinary actions were designed for the benefit of human beings and were not evil. Since God’s judgment might have the appearance of evil in the eyes of those who did not know him, God had to employ his agents to establish discipline in the world with the intention of benefiting humankind. Those proxies that were appointed by God and that were distinct from him, functioned as a sort of firewall by virtue of which God could be isolated from the sphere of evil.

As regards Gen. 11:7, Philo\textsuperscript{60} argued that the LORD said “let us ...” to his agents whom he commissioned to go down and to confuse the language. God’s agents or proxies were thought of by Philo in both personal and impersonal (abstract) terms. Consequently, it is legitimate to say that for Philo, those agents were philosophical categories which were symbolised by personal intermediary beings that in the Tanakh were known as angels. Thus, Philo adduced Gen. 48:15-16 as proof of this thesis, claiming that in v. 15 the action of sustaining Jacob was attributed to God\textsuperscript{61} because it was absolutely good, whereas the action of shielding Jacob from all evil must be ascribed to the angel(s) acting on God’s behalf because God himself could not be involved in fending off evil without relating to evil or to evil forces.

Commenting upon Gen. 48:15-16, Rashi\textsuperscript{62} cited the narrative recorded in Gen. 31:11-13 where in v. 11 God’s angel was speaking to Jacob, while in v. 13 God was speaking to Jacob. For Rashi, since God was dealing with human beings through his angels, a switch between God and God’s angel(s) in biblical narratives was natural. In his commentary on Gen. 48:15-16 Abraham ibn Ezra\textsuperscript{63} made reference to Exod. 23:20 in which the LORD was said to send his angel in order to guard his children.\textsuperscript{64} Analysing Gen. 48:15-16, Kimhi\textsuperscript{65} wrote that God was acting in the world through his angels who represented him and who were sent by him to protect and to guide his children. Moreover, Kimhi quoted Ps. 34:7/8 in which the LORD and the LORD’s angel were portrayed in such a way that they switched between one another, while shielding and delivering God’s children. Glancing at Gen. 48:15-16, Hezekiah ben Manoah (חזקיה בן מנוח)\textsuperscript{66} ascertained that there was no contradiction

\textsuperscript{57} Swete, ed., The Old Testament, vol. 1, 97 [Gen. 48:15-16].
\textsuperscript{58} Berliner, ed., Targum, vol. 1, 56 [Gen. 48:15-16].
\textsuperscript{59} Philo “De confusione linguarum,” 263-264 [36].
\textsuperscript{60} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{61} Philo used θεός instead of the LXX κύριος.
\textsuperscript{62} Berliner, ed., Raschi, 93 [Gen. 48:16].
\textsuperscript{63} Abraham ibn Ezra, “משה או רashi" [Exod. 23:20].
\textsuperscript{64} Expounding Exod. 23:20, Abraham ibn Ezra spoke of angels as of God’s messengers and agents in relation to human beings. Abraham ibn Ezra, “משה או רashi" [Exod. 23:20].
\textsuperscript{65} Kimhi, Kommentar zur Genesis, ed. Abraham Ginzburg (Pressburg [Bratislava]: Schmid, 1842), 88r [Gen. 48:16].
\textsuperscript{66} Hezekiah ben Manoah, "משה או רashi" [Gen. 48:15-16].
between Gen. 48:15 speaking of God and Gen. 48:16 speaking of God’s angel because God carried out the action of delivering mentioned in v. 16 through his angel.

**Exodus 12:12 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi**

For Abraham ben Daud Halevi, אלוהים מצרימי (Exod. 12:12) denoted Egyptian idols ( asshole). In Exod. 12:12 the Septuagint 67 translated אלוהים מצרימי as gods of Egyptians, while the Targum Onkelos 68 – as the idol(s). The same exposition was enshrined in the grand Midrash on the Book of Exodus 69 and in the Mekhilta. 70 Additionally, the Midrash presented Num. 33:4 as a text parallel to Exod. 12:12. In the case of Num. 33:4 the LORD brought judgment on “their [i.e. Egyptians]” gods (LXX) 71 or idols (Targum Onkelos) 72, as gods (Targum Onkelos) 73. Abraham ibn Ezra 74 was inclined to interpret אלהים מצרימי in Num. 33:4 as idols, while Joseph Bekhor Shor (Yipch bcbor vshor) 75 mentioned that in the Tanakh the mighty (לארד) and leaders (ספ) could be called אליים יתימיה (Nahmanides) 76 as proof of his thesis. Therefore, Shor tended to explicate אלהים מצרימי in Num. 33:4 as leaders of Egyptian society. 77 The Babylonian Talmud 78 evoked Exod. 12:12, articulating that in the Scripture even an idol might be denominated as אלוהים מצרימי, depending on the context.

Following the Mekhilta, Rashi 79 clarified that in Exod. 12:12 אלהים מצרימי denoted idols. Abraham ibn Ezra 77 interpreted אלהים מצרימי from Exod. 12:12 in the same way, comparing it to Num. 33:4. Nahmanides 80 recapitulated this prevailing interpretation cum the reference to Num. 33:4, and adding that in view of Isa 24:21 אלהים מצרימי might also be understood as the heavenly princes (שרים) who were shielding Egyptians. This ‘celestial’ explanation was subsequently advanced by Obadiah Sforno (משה פורנו) 81 On the other hand, Hezekiah ben Manoah 82 maintained that Num. 33:4 allowed for a different interpretation of אלהים מצרימי (Elyon מצרימי) or bad (Exod. 12:12). In his Book of Roots: David Kimhi 83 juxtaposed אלהים מצרימי from 2 Sam. 7:23 with אלהים מצרימי from Exod. 12:12, realising that in those passages could be interpreted at least in two ways.

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68 Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 72 [Exod. 12:12].
69 Rashi, *Midrash*, vol. 72 [Exod. 12:12].
70 Isaac Hirsch Weiss, *Mechilta: Der älteste halachische und hagadische Kommentar zum zweiten Buch Moses* (Vienna: Schlossberg, 1865), 10r [No. 7 ושם].
72 Berliner, ed., *Targum*, vol. 1, 189 [Num. 33:4].
73 Abraham ibn Ezra, *Mechilta: Der älteste halachische und hagadische Kommentar zum zweiten Buch Moses* (Union City: Bros, [s. a.]), 441 [Num. 33:4].
75 Yipch bcbor vshor, *Pirkei Rishon* (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1861), 25r [No. 25a].
76 Berliner, ed., *Rashi*, 122 [Exod. 12:12].
79 Expounding Isa 24:21 (Rashi and Joseph Kara spoke of celestial princes (אלהי), while Abraham ibn Ezra and Kimhi – of celestial messengers (לארד) that could plausibly be equated with angels.
82 Hezekiah ben Manoah, *Pirkei Rishon*, 157 [Exod. 12:12].
83 Moses and Aaron, to be exact.
83 Kimhi, *Radicum*, 17 [s. v. אלהים מצרימי].
which was noteworthy from an exegetical perspective. Commenting on in 2 Sam. 7:23, Kimhi84 recognised that could signify either the idol(s) worshipped by Egyptians (literally: Egypt’s idol[s]) in the light of Exod. 12:12 or Egyptian leaders (literally: Egypt’s leaders) in the same way as was said to denote leaders ( in Exod. 22:27/28).

Exodus 22:8 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi
In Exod. 22:8 Abraham ben Daud Halevi explicated which coincided with the traditional Jewish elucidation of in Exod. 22, especially, in Exod. 22:7-8 and in Exod. 22:27/28. Nonetheless, in Exod. 22:8 the Samaritan text85 replaced with God’s very name (יahu) and – with . Similarly, the Septuagint86 translated both and as thêôs, while Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion87 interpreted as (gods). On the other hand, the Targum Onkelos88 and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan89 translated both and as the judge(s) [sing. ] in Judges. The Mekhila,90 the Babylonian Talmud91 and Yalkut Shimoni92 did likewise and this interpretation was espoused by the mainstream of the Jewish exegesis.93

Judges 11:24, 16:23, 17:5, 18:24 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi
According to Abraham ben Daud Halevi, in Judg. 11:24, 16:23, 17:5, 18:24 denoted idols (אלהים) which was evident from the context of those passages. Judg. 11:24 contrasted Chemosh, who was called “your god” (i.e. idol), with “our God” (אלהים) who was the LORD (יahu). In this verse the LXX94 resorted to the generic thêôs, while the Targum95 clarified that “your idol” (דאון) was meant. In Judg. 16:23 and 18:24 referred to Dagon. Again, the Septuagint96 employed the generic thêôs, whereas the Targum97 preferred to speak of “their idol”.

In the light of the narrative, of which Judg. 17:5 was a part, described a house of idols, namely, a temple dedicated to idols. As previously, the LXX98 translated this

84 Kimhi, (Lublin: בקירין, [s. a.]), 301-303 [2 Sam. 7:23].
85 Blayney, ed., , 197 [Exod. 22:8/9].
89 “Targum Jonathan,” 144 [Exod. 22:8].
90 Weiss, ed., , 98v [No. 15 (Exod. 22:8)].
91 Swete, ed., , vol. 1, 4v [No. 4b]. Ibidem, 56v [No. 56b]. “טבאל בלא נפתל, הבא קמא נפשך,” in , vol. 11 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1861), 84–84v [No. 84-84b].
95 De Lagarde, ed., , 51 [Judg. 11:24].
96 Swete, ed., , vol. 1, 521 [Judg. 16:23].
97 De Lagarde, ed., , 57 [Judg. 16:23].
98 Swete, ed., , vol. 1, 523 [Judg. 17:5].
expression as a house of ὕστος, while the Targum⁹⁸ – as a house of idols. Expounding Judg. 17:5, Rashi¹⁰⁰ affirmed that in the aforementioned verse אלהים signified an idolatrous temple, and he maintained that in the Micah narrative (i.e. in Judg. 17:1-18:31) was used in its non-divine (אלהים) denotation except for Judg. 18:31 where the LORD’s sanctuary in Shiloh was referred to. Rashi’s remark was rooted in the Babylonian Talmud¹⁰¹ which stated that in the Micah narrative God’s very name (יהוה), which always denoted God of Israel, was *eo ipso* used in a sacred way (τὸ γλυπτόν),¹⁰² while אלהים, except for Judg. 18:31, referred to idols.¹⁰³ Later, the proposition, that in Judg. 17:5 האלהים depicted a temple dedicated to idols, was espoused by Gersonides (חָלֶה)¹⁰⁴ and by Kimhi¹⁰⁵ who quoted the Targumic rendition of that passage and who recapitulated the Talmudic reference. As far as Judg. 18:31 is concerned, the Septuagint¹⁰⁶ translated אלהים as a house of ὕστος whereas the Targum¹⁰⁷ emphasised that, unlike Micah’s shrines, the sanctuary in Shiloh was the LORD’s temple (Beth Melasha יד). This natural interpretation was subsequently reflected in the commentaries written by Kimhi¹⁰⁸ and by Gersonides.¹⁰⁹

Since Judg. 18:24 declared that “my gods” ( אלהי) were made, it was clear that in the aforementioned verse אלהים denoted idols granted that the LORD was the Creator, not a creature. The LXX¹¹⁰ highlighted this fact by employing τὸ γλυπτόν (a carved image) which was a technical term for an idol. On the other hand, Theodotion’s version¹¹¹ read “my gods”. The Targum¹¹² to Judg. 18:24 proposed a figurative interpretation “my [object of] awe (דהלא) which I made” provided that the Aramaic דָהֵל could denote either a relationship of awe or an object of awe with reference either to true God or to the idol(s).¹¹³

**Ezekiel 17:13 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi**

In Ezek. 17:13 Abraham ben Daud Halevi elucidated אלהי as strongmen of the land (הוחמא שבאראותה) which was congruous with the Targum¹¹⁴ and with the LXX.¹¹⁵ Although from a contemporary perspective it is debatable whether אלהי in that verse must be parsed this way, the ancient translations made the connection between אלהי and the root לא conveying the idea of might, strength and power. Besides, the Talmudic references to Ezek.

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⁹⁸ De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 58 [Judg. 17:5].
⁹⁹ Rashi, in שְׁתֵי יָמי תִּפְדֵנִים (Lublin: שְׁתֵי יָמי תִּפְדֵנִים, [s. a.]), 138-139 [Judg. 17:5].
¹⁰¹ See: Judg. 17:2-3, 17:13, 18:6. This interpretation was fully supported by the Targum. Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 58 [Judg. 17:2-3].
¹⁰² Ibíd. [Judg. 17:13]. Ibídem, 59 [Judg. 18:6].
¹⁰³ Ibíd. [Judg. 18:5]. Ibíd. 10 [Judg. 18:10]. Ibíd. 60 [Judg. 18:24].
¹⁰⁴ Gersonides, in שְׁתֵי יָמי תִּפְדֵנִים, 138-139 [Judg. 17:5].
¹⁰⁵ Kimhi, in שְׁתֵי יָמי תִּפְדֵנִים, 138-139 [Judg. 17:5].
¹⁰⁷ De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, 60 [Judg. 18:31].
¹¹² De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, vol. 1, 526 [Judg. 18:24].
¹¹³ De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, vol. 1, 461 [Judg. 18:24 (Theodotion)).
¹¹⁴ De Lagarde, ed., *Prophetae*, vol. 1, 461 [Judg. 18:24 (Theodotion)).
17:13 implied that אֵילֵי in the aforementioned verse stemmed from אל and communicated a sense of gravity. Consequently, both Rashi and Kimhi interpreted אֵילֵי as “princes of the land”. (FromFile)

Psalms 82:6-7 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

In Ps. 82:6-7 Abraham ben Daud Halevi interpreted אלהים as wise persons (חכמים). To understand his point, it is necessary to analyse the function of אלהים in the whole psalm in the light of a series of parallelisms. According to Ps. 82:1, God (אֱלֹהִים) stood in the assembly of אלהים, namely, God was giving judgment among אלהים. Granted that in Ps. 82:1b God’s judgment took place among אלהים, אלהים must be construed as denoting plural beings. Since אלהים from Ps. 82:1b was parallel to אל from Ps. 82:1a, אל might be understood collectively, namely, as denoting a body (group) of beings denominated as אלהים. From the parallelism it is evident that the status of being אלהים was concomitant with the status of being God’s children. In the context of that psalm this status was viewed as a moral obligation to act justly, especially as far as the underprivileged were concerned.

In Ps. 82:1 the Septuagint claimed that God (θεός) stood in the assembly of gods (ἐν συναγωγῇ θεῶν), giving judgment among gods (ἐν μέσῳ θεοὺς). As regards Ps. 82:1a, Aquila’s version interpreted אלהים collectively and adjectivally by virtue of which God was said to stand in the assembly of the mighty (ἐν συναγωγῇ ἰσχυρῶν). On the other hand, it seems that in Ps. 82:1 Symmachus’ version explicated both אלהים and אלהים in terms of amplification, presuming that God stood “in the assembly of God”, videlicet, God was his own court and acted on his own behalf as a court to himself. Consequently, in Ps. 82:6 the LXX translated אלהים as gods (θεοί).

The Targum offered a coherent exposition of אלהים and אלהים in Ps. 82, announcing that in Ps. 82:1 God presided over an assembly of the righteous (צדקינים) who were fluent in the Torah and that God was giving judgment among the honest judges (דינים). Thus, in Ps. 82:6 the Targum stated that Israelites should be considered to be (שמיים) like (א) angels (מלאכים). In other words, Israelites were called to earn a reputation for their righteous way of living which should resemble that of heavenly (i.e. good) angels. The same reasoning was reflected in the Midrash on the Book of Psalms and in the Pirke attributed to Rabbi Eliezer. The Babylonian Talmud interpreted עדת אלהים in Ps. 82:1a as the assembly of Israel, while אלהים in Ps. 82:1b – as judges.

117 Rashi, ספר יחזקאל, in מקראות גדולות ספר יחזקאל (Lublin: שניידמעסער, [s. a.]), 132 [Ezek. 17:13].
118 Kimhi, ספר יחזקאל, in מקראות גדולות ספר יחזקאל, 131 [Ezek. 17:13].
121 Ibidem [Ps. 82:1-6 /LXX 81:1-6/ (Symmachus)].
123 Buber, ed., Midrash, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1859), 6r [No. 6a]. “סנהדרין,” 6v [No. 6b]. Moreover, the latter tract interpreted Ps. 82 in the light of 2 Chr. 19:5-11.
Commenting upon Ps. 82:1, Rashi\textsuperscript{126} wrote that God acted as a chief judge among other judges (דְּבוֹרָתָה יִשְׂרָאֵל), but he did not specify whether those associate judges were earthly or heavenly magistrates. Thus, Rashi interpreted אָלָהֶם in Ps. 82:1a and אֱלֹהִים in Ps. 82:1b as judges, while in Ps. 82:6 he explicated אֱלֹהִים as angels.\textsuperscript{127}

Abraham ibn Ezra\textsuperscript{128} was inclined to interpretoled פִּתְאָה as the assembly of Israel (עדת יִשְׂרָאֵל), working on the assumption that he simply qualified the assembly (God’s assembly, the assembly belonging to [i.e. to God]). Actually, the Babylonian Talmud\textsuperscript{129} explicatedoled פִּתְאָה as the assembly of Israel. In Hebrew the construct chain, as exemplified by Ps. 82:1a (עדת יִשְׂרָאֵל), could easily communicate the idea of Israel as the community defined by the Covenant with God.\textsuperscript{130} In Ps. 82:1b and in Ps. 82:6 Abraham ibn Ezra\textsuperscript{131} suggested to explicateoled פִּתְאָה as angels among whom God was judging and who were pictured as the sons of the Most High. He added that in the Scripture angels could be calledoled פִּתְאָה because they were God’s agents and they carried out God’s orders and God’s judgment in the world. Besides, Abraham ibn Ezra summarised an alternative interpretation according to whicholed פִּתְאָה in Ps. 82:6 signified judges in the same way as in Exod. 22:27/28.

In his commentary on Ps. 82:1 Kimhi\textsuperscript{132} asserted that those among whom God was portrayed as giving judgment, were earthly leaders (השופטים) or earthly judges (הדינים).\textsuperscript{133} Since those leaders proved to judge unjustly, God called them to take their mission seriously and to honour his precepts through their actions. Based on the Babylonian Talmud,\textsuperscript{134} Kimhi presumed that Ps. 82 corresponded to 2 Chr. 19:5-11 which described Jehoshaphat’s admonition against perversion of justice. Following 2 Chr. 19:5-11, Kimhi avowed that those who would dispense justice, were authorised by the LORD to carry out this noble task, and thus were bound by God’s commandments. Expounding Ps. 82:6, Kimhi\textsuperscript{135} attempted to bring together the juridical and angelic interpretation. Consequently, those judges (шед יִשְׂרָאֵל) who abode by God’s law, could be calledoled פִּתְאָה on the stipulation that in the Tanakholed פִּתְאָה was used with reference to those who represented God in the world and who acted on his behalf. For Kimhi, to beoled פִּתְאָה in Ps. 82:6 meant to be the sons of the Most High, namely, to live according to God’s will. From Kimhi’s perspective, the way of living, which was designed by the LORD for his children, including his judges, who were mandated by God to administer justice in accordance with his law, reflected that of good angels. Abraham ben Daud Halevi’s proposition, that in Ps. 82:6-7oled פִּתְאָה might be interpreted as the wise, did not contradict the prevailing Jewish exposition of that psalm because wisdom defined as a moral aptitude was what God expected from Israelites and from judges dispensing justice on his behalf.

Job 38:7 referred to by Abraham ben Daud Halevi

Expounding Job 38:7, Abraham ben Daud Halevi discerned a parallelism betweenoled פִּתְאָה and בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים. Therefore, he concluded that in the aforementioned verse sons ofoled פִּתְאָה...
denoted morning stars (celestial bodies) as God’s creatures. The same exposition was adopted by Abraham ibn Ezra. Nonetheless, the Septuagint and the Targum translated בניך אלים as angels. This might imply that the ancient Jewish interpreters construed כוכבי בקר as a figurative expression standing for angels. On the other hand, Aquila’s and Theodotion’s versions rendered בני אלים as sons of God.

Abraham ben Daud Halevi on God’s Proxies

In addition, Abraham ben Daud Halevi cited the example of the biblical narratives (e.g. Gen. 16:7-11, 18-19, 28:12-13, 31:11-13; Judg. 6:11-14) in which God (depicted either as אלהים or as בַּן אלהים) and the angel(s) were inextricably intertwined with one another and appeared interchangeably. He pointed out that such an interface was caused by the fact that the angel(s) acted on behalf of the Divine in the world (e.g. Exod. 23:20-21).

Judah Halevi

In his compendium Judah Halevi declared that אלהים signified the one or those who would govern or rule (sing. מושל) something or the one or those who would be in a position to judge (sing. דיין). Thus, אלהים conveyed a sense of power (性强), which, depending on its degree, could be predicated of created human or angelic beings or of the Creator. Halevi recognised אלהים as the plural form of אלה – which was coined to express the plenitude of power (כח) by means of the plural of majesty and which could also be applied to the idol(s) styled this way by idol worshippers.

Judah Halevi derived אלהים from איל and אל which, in his opinion, communicated the idea of power and strength. In addition, אל could assume the plural form אלים which should be viewed in the same way as אלהים. Furthermore, Halevi argued that such biblical expressions as אלהי אלהים or אלהי האלילים depicted God as the One who was holding sway over all his powers and who encapsulated all of them. Although God’s very name was unique and referred to God of Israel, Halevi realised that at times it was applied to the instruments of the LORD’s presence, for instance, to the LORD’s ark (e.g. Num. 10:35-36).

Maimonides

In his Guide for the Perplexed Maimonides admitted that in Exod. 22:7-8 אלהים denoted leaders. He added that in some passages אלהים could also signify angels provided that God was ruling over angels (שופט על המלאכים). Consequently, a widespread expression, אלהי האלהים was interpreted by Maimonides as “God of the angels”. Moreover, Maimonides recalled that the Hebrew appellation מלאך could denote a human messenger (e.g. Gen. 32:3/4) or a prophet (e.g. Judg. 2:1; Num. 20:16).

From Maimonides’ perspective, God governed the world through the angels that represented him and that carried out his will. Thus, in Gen. 1:26 and in Gen. 11:7 God said

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136 Abraham ibn Ezra, "ספר איוב", in מקראות גדולות ספר איוב (Bnei Brak: ספרי קודש מישור, 1990), 208 [Job 38:7].
137 Swete, ed., The Old Testament, vol. 2, 591 [Job 38:7].
138 “Targum,” in Biblia sacra polyglotta, vol. 3, 76 [Job 38:7].
140 Judah Halevi, Das Buch, 298-345 [IV, 1-25].
142 Human denotation was stressed by the Targum Onkelos which translated מלאך as נביא. Berliner, ed., Targum, vol. 1, 35 [Gen. 32:3/4].
143 The Targum interpreted מלאך as נביא. Lagarde, ed., Prophetae, 35 [Judg. 2:1].
“let us...” to his angels, engaging them either by having a consultation with them (Gen. 1:26) or by sending them to confuse the language (Gen. 11:7). Such an interpretation was, as Maimonides noticed, recorded in the Babylonian Talmud\(^{144}\) and in the grand Midrash on the Book of Genesis.\(^{145}\)

**Joseph Albo**

In his compendium Joseph Albo\(^{146}\) explained that אלוהים described a “master of ability” (המורה על היכולת), namely, the One who was vested with special powers. Therefore, it was obvious to Albo that אלוהים could refer to the Creator as to the One was vested with all the powers or to the created agents of power such as human judges (הדיינים) or angels (המלאכים).

Furthermore, Albo ascertained that since the LORD was governing the world through angels, many biblical narratives mentioned God and his angel(s) interchangeably. For instance, Exod. 13:21 spoke of the LORD going in a pillar of cloud, whereas Exod. 14:19 – of God’s angel (מלאך האלים) doing likewise. Similarly, in Judg. 6:11-27 the LORD and God’s angel were talking to Gideon alternately. The same interplay between God and his angel(s) occurred in Gen. 31:11-13 and in Exod. 3:2-4.

**Conclusion**

The compendia, which were studied in the present article, offered an adequate exposition of אלוהים/ אלהים in the Hebrew Bible though it was less extensive than that found in the Jewish medieval lexica and grammars. In those compendia the multi-faceted denotation of אלוהים/ אלהים was analysed in the light of the biblical passages which illustrated iconic aspects of the meaning thereof. In principle, אלהים/ אלהים could denote the divine, idolatrous or human agent(s) of power.

While expounding the Scripture, the authors of those compendia relied on the Jewish exegetical tradition, primarily, on the Targumim, Midrashim and on the biblical interpretation evidenced in the Babylonian Talmud. Furthermore, the exegesis propounded by the authors of those compendia coincided with the mainstream of the Jewish ancient and medieval exegesis. By analysing the biblical passages, which were referred to in the aforementioned compendia, in the light of the ancient Jewish translations (the LXX cum its revisions and the Targumim) and in the light of the classic Jewish literature (Midrashim, Talmudim, Pirkes, etc.) and commentaries, the continuum of the Jewish tradition could be discerned and studied. This tradition established itself as the ceaseless process of rereading the Scripture and the classic Jewish literature which surrounded the Tanakh, bearing testimony to the history of biblical interpretation in the context of the Covenant.

Finally, the compendia in question proved to be attentive to the literary features of the biblical narratives in which God and God’s angel(s) occurred interchangeably. This interplay was explained as a consequence of the theological function of angels as the instruments by means of which God was governing the world, carrying out his will and interacting with human beings.

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\(^{144}\) *סנהדרין*, 38v [No. 38b].

\(^{145}\) Theodor and Albeck, ed., *Bereschit Rabba mit kritischem Apparat und Kommentar: Parascha I-XLVII*, 54-67 [No. 8 פרשה (Gen. 1:26-27)].

\(^{146}\) Albo, *ספר העקרים*, 25r-29v [I, XI]. Ibidem, 92v-95r [II, XXVIII].
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