What Does It Mean to Be a "Man"? The Noun *'ish* in Biblical Hebrew: A Reconsideration (*cont'd*)

Part II. EVIDENCE FOR SELECTED SENSES: *'ANASHIM* AT WORK

II.A. Further Biblical Citations

II.A.1. Let me now gauge the Bible's frequency of use of *'ish* in the five senses of affiliation identified in Part I: agent, householder, authority, subordinate, and representative. I will do so by offering a list that focuses first and foremost on contexts where neither maleness nor adulthood is at issue, and where the usages are grammatically absolute and syntactically conspicuous. Why? Because those are the most revealing and compelling cases in support of the thesis that *'ish* is primarily a term of affiliation.

II.A.2. To fill out the picture, I list additional related cases, including construct forms and appositives, as noted.

II.A.3. I have not analyzed every instance of *'ish* in the Bible. (I will later cite favorably the conclusions of a scholar who did so.) Given constraints of time and expertise, I am striving in this memorandum only to make a case for my thesis, not to prove it conclusively. The following list is not exhaustive, yet it is complete enough to be taken seriously. I have drawn these examples mainly from the Torah (Pentateuch), which was the focus of my translation work.

II.A.4. The following list cites 217 further instances that meet the qualifications of II.A.1: 71 cases of *'ish* as "agent," 51 cases as "householder," 42 cases as "the authority in question," 16 cases as "subordinate," and 37 cases as "representative member"—a total of 222 examples.

II.A.5. Unfortunately, space does not permit full quotation of the passages, let alone an analysis of each instance listed. The underlined citations contain the most similar constructions to the paradigmatic instance.

II.A.6. Some instances plausibly fit into more than one category—that is, their syntactic and narrative contexts do not restrict their sense to only one of these meanings. (Such overlap may signal that English terms do not correspond exactly to the thought categories of biblical Hebrew, a matter that I intend to address in Part III.)

II.B. List of Biblical Citations, by Sense

II.B.1. *'ish* as "agent" (as in Gen. 12:20)

Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to someone who speaks or acts for another person (or deity) or for a group, such as when dispatched during a particular mission:

Gen. 18:2, 16, 22; **19**:5, 8 (second instance); **24**:21, 22, 26, 29, 30 (twice), 32, 58, 61; **43**:15, 16 (twice), 17, 18, 24, 33; **44**:1 (first instance), 3, 4; **Lev. 16**:21; **Num. 1**:4 (third instance), 5, 17, 44 (second instance); **13**:2 (first instance), 16, 31; **14**:36, 37, 38; **19**:9; **22**:9, 20, 35; **Deut. 1**:22; **Josh. 2**:1, 2; **7**:2 (twice); **10**:18; **Judg. 20**:12; **1 Sam. 4**:13, 14, 16; **17**:8; **25**:11; **2 Sam. 10**:5; **18**:24; **24**:9 (second instance); **1 Kgs. 20**:33; **2 Kgs. 2**:17; **5**:24; **6**:32; **Jer. 20**:15, 16; **26**:22 (first instance); **Ezek. 9**:2 (first and third instances), 3, 11; **Ps. 105**:17

(*special mention—usage*) Where one's position as a brother automatically conveys the sole authorization to speak or act on behalf of the family: **Gen. 34**:7, 21, 22; **Deut. 25**:7, 9

(*special mention—grammar*) Bound forms that designate an agent: **2 Sam. 18**:20, 27

(*special mention—grammar and usage*) Bound forms that designate an agent, in which God is the principal and the agency is ongoing: **Deut. 33**:1 + (69) other *'ish ha-'elohim* + (6) *'ish 'elohim*

II.B.2. *'ish* as "householder" (as in Gen. 26:13, citing 51 further absolute and conspicuous instances; for more instances with *gadol* beyond those underlined, cf. Exod. 11:3; 2 Kings 5:1 [twice]; Esther 9:4)

Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to the head of a beyt 'av, *who has the authority to decide or act for that socioeconomic unit:*

Gen. 13:8; **19**:9; **26**:11, 13; **29**:19; **38**:25; **42**:11, 13; **46**:32; **Exod. 1**:1; **2**:21; **Num. 9**:6, 7, 13; **Deut. 1**:31; **8**:5; **22**:16, 18; **Judg. 1**:25, 26; **17**:11; **18**:19; **19**:16 (first and second instances); **1 Sam. 1**:1, 3, 21; **17**:12 (first and second instances); **25**:2 (twice), 3 (twice); **27**:3 (second instance); **2 Sam. 2**:3 (second instance); **17**:25; **19**:33; **Jer. 23**:34; **Mic. 2**:2; **Ps. 112**:5; **Prov. 7**:19; **Job 1**:1 (twice), 3; **Ruth 1**:1, 2; **Eccles. 6**:2 (twice), 3; **9**:14, 15 (twice)

(*special mention—grammar*) Bound forms or appositives that conspicuously designate a householder: **Gen. 20**:7; **24**:13; **38**:1, 2; **Exod. 12**:44; **21**:7; **Lev. 21**:9; **22**:12; **Num. 5**:19 (second instance), 20 (first and third instances), 29; **30**:11; **Judg. 19**:1; **2 Sam. 1**:13; **Ruth 1**:3, 5, 9

(*special mention—usage*) Less conspicuous usage but where the context suits "householder": **Gen. 29**:19, **42**:11, 13; **Num. 27**:8; **30**:3; **Deut. 21**:15, 18; **22**:13; **23**:1; **24**:1, 11; **25**:5; **28**:54; **31**:12; **Judg. 1**:24; **1 Sam. 30**:13; **Jer. 18**:21; **Neh. 4**:16

II.B.3. *'ish* as "the authority in question" (as in Gen. 43:3)

Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to someone who is authorized to decide or act for the group in question:

Gen. 20:8; **39**:1, 14; **41**:33, 38; **43**:5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 17 (first and third instances), 19, 24 (first instance); **44**:15, 26; **Gen. 49**:6; **Exod. 2**:14; **4**:19; **10**:7; **11**:3; **32**:1, 23; **Num. 12**:3; **27**:16, 18; **34**:17, 19; **Deut. 17**:15; **1 Sam. 4**:18; **26**:15; **2 Sam. 10**:6, 8; **1 Kgs. 2**:2, **11**:28; **2 Kgs. 5**:1 (twice); **Jer. 22**:30 (first instance); **Esther 9**:4; **Dan. 9**:21; **Neh. 1**:11

(*special mention—usage*) Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to a leader's descendant who inherits the position of leadership: **Deut. 33**:8; **1 Sam. 2**:33; **1 Kgs. 8**:25; **Jer. 22**:30 (second instance); **33**:17; **2 Chron. 6**:16

(*special mention—grammar*) Bound forms or appositives that conspicuously designate an authority: **Gen. 42**:30, 33; **Lev. 21**:9; **Josh. 9**:6–7; **Judg. 7**:14; **Isa. 5**:3, 7; **Jer. 38**:7; **1 Chron. 27**:32

(*special mention—grammar and usage*) Adjectival expressions in direct speech that conspicuously refer to an authority: **1 Kgs. 1**:42 (where *'ish chayil* refers to Jonathan the priest); **2 Sam. 4**:11 (where *'anashim resha'im* refers to Saul's company commanders, and *'ish tzaddiq* refers to Ish-Bosheth the pretender to the throne).

(*special mention—grammar and usage*) Bound forms that designate a responsible body such as a town council, perhaps comprised of householders (e.g., *'anshei ha-'ir*): **Gen. 13**:13;

> **19**:4; **26**:7 (twice); **29**:22; **34**:20; **38**:21, 22; **Deut. 21**:21; **22**:21; **Judg. 6**:27, 28, 30; **8**:15, 16, 17; **14**:18; **19**:16 (third instance), 22; **1 Kings 21:**11; **2 Kings 2:**19; **23**:17; **Eccles. 9**:14 (first instance); **Ezra 1**:4

(*special mention—usage*) Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to a husband, in having jurisdiction for his wife: **Num. 5**:12, 15, 30, 31

(*special mention—grammar and usage*) Bound forms that refer conspicuously to a husband: There are several dozen such instances, which are well recognized—and usually translated as "husband"—and therefore not cited here.

II.B.4. *'ish* as "subordinate" (as in Gen. 45:1; cf. also Gen. 20:8, 43:17, 19, 24; 2 Kgs. 5:1)

Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to someone who takes direction as part of a group such as a household, retinue, or military unit:

> **Gen. 24**:32, 54, 59; **32**:7; **33**:1; **39**:11; **Exod. 5**:9; **Num. 16**:14; **1 Sam. 22**:6; **2 Sam. 13**:9 (twice); **1 Kgs. 11**:17, 18; **20**:17; **2 Kgs. 25**:23; **Neh. 2**:12

(*special mention—grammar*) Bound forms or appositives that conspicuously designate a subordinate, military or otherwise: **Gen. 17**:23; **24**:59; **Num. 25**:5; **Josh. 10**:2; **Judg. 8**:15; **1 Sam. 18**:27; **23**:5; **23**:8, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26; **24**:3, 4, 7, 8, 23; **25**:13, 20; **27**:3, 8; **28**:1; **29**:2, 11; **30**:1, 3, 31; **31**:6; **2 Sam. 2:**3, 29, 32; **5**:6, 21; **15**:22; **16**:13; **17**:8; **1 Kings 10**:8; **2 Kings 11**:9; **25**:24; Jer. **40**:7, 8, 9; **Zech. 7**:22

II.B.5. *'ish* as "representative member" (as in Gen. 47:2)

Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to someone who is a representative member that stands in or acts for the rest of the group (e.g., a delegate), or is part of a sample selected from a larger group:

> **Num. 1**:4, 5, 17, 44; **11**:16, 24, 25, 26; **13:**2 (second and third instances); **Deut. 1**:13, 15, 23 (twice); **Josh. 3**:12; **4**:2, 4; **8**:12; **18**:4, 8, 9; **Judg. 6**:27; **18**:2 (twice); **20**:10, 11 (first instance); **1 Sam. 24**:3; **2 Sam. 21**:6; **2 Kings 3**:26; **Jer. 38**:10, 11; **Ezek. 8**:11 (first instance); **9**:6 (second instance); **Ruth 4**:2; **2 Chron. 24**:24; **28**:12, 15

(*special mention—usage*) Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to military troops, who are selected from a larger pool, to represent the populace on the battlefield: **Exod. 17**:9; **Num. 31**:3

(*special mention—grammar and usage*) Bound forms that refer conspicuously to a military champion who represents a larger body, or to military troops as representatives of a larger body: **1 Sam. 17**:4, 23; **2 Sam. 23**:21 (first instance); **24**:9 (second instance)

(*special mention—usage*) Absolute forms that refer conspicuously to a representative member of the group in the sense of "typical": **Exod. 16**:20; **Deut. 3**:11

II.C. Conventional Explanations

In I.B. and II.B, I identified five senses of *'ish* that denote affiliation. To the extent that grammarians, critical scholars, and other exegetes account for these usages at all, they do so in various ways. As I understand their explanations, they do not seem wholly adequate.

II.C.1. *Grammatical Solutions*

II.C.1.a. Grammarians do not analyze a word's absolute form and its lexical values but rather how it combines with other words. To the extent that they discuss *'ish*, it is in a construct chain or an appositive, and they do not always succeed. Consider, for example, the anomalous pairing of terms in Gen. 13:8, *ki 'anashim 'achim 'anachnu* (literally "for we are *'anashim* brothers" but with emphasis on the two nouns). The critical scholar Claus Westermann explains this as being the grammatical construction known as "collocation of genus and species," an apposition in which the first noun is general and the second noun more specific. Westermann cites the modern classic Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley grammar (GKC; second edition, 1910) § 131b.

Westermann fails to note, however, that GKC has "cf." before our entry, suggesting that its editors did not consider our case to be a clear fit in that grammatical category. Presumably that's because for Abram to employ such a construction in dialogue as a self-reference would be strange, and because the usage in 13:8 is conspicuous; the word *'anashim* could be omitted and still make complete sense as "for we are kinsmen." What sensible reading of this verse would deem it necessary for Abram to remind his nephew that they were both adult males?

A more contextually meaningful rendering would be something like: "we householders (each with our livestock and our herders) both represent the same kinship group (and therefore we shouldn't compete for scarce resources)."[1]

II.C.1.b. Another authoritative grammatical reference work is Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor's magisterial *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (IBHS, 1990). It calls *'ish* a "generic noun of class," claiming that our term can mark as indefinite a personal noun (§ 13.8b; cf. § 13.4c), citing: "The LORD sent a prophet (*'ish navi'*) to the Israelites, and he said to them, 'Thus says the LORD: . . .'" (Judg. 6:8). Similarly, IBHS holds that when *'ish* appears as the head term in a construct chain, it is a "conventional idiom" in which the genitive serves to specify "the nature, quality, character, or condition" of the (generic) man or men in question. "These locutions supplement the meager stock of adjectives in Hebrew," the authors explain (§ 9.5.3a–b). Finally, IBHS recognizes the appositional construction discussed above, which it calls *sortal* (§ 12.3b–c): "a broad class term followed by a somewhat narrower term, of the same type." The authors characterize *'ish* as one of "the broadest possible generic terms for people" and give the example of *'ish kohen* ("a man, a priest" = "a priest") in Lev. 21:9.

II.C.1.c. Again, what these categorizations take for granted is the resulting superfluity (that is, senselessness) of *'ish* in many of the construct or appositional usages. Why does Judg. 6:8 say "The LORD sent a prophet (*'ish navi'*)" rather than simply "The LORD sent a prophet (*navi'*)," as in 2 Chron. 24:19 and 25:15? (The noun *navi'* is indefinite either way.) The grammarians would respond that this is simply the manner of biblical Hebrew style at times, whereas my answer is that *'ish* conveys something additionally meaningful where it appears. Thus in Judg. 6:8 the clause means "The LORD sent as an emissary a prophet . . ." Similarly, why does Leviticus describe a priest's daughter as *bat 'ish kohen* in 21:9 but as *bat kohen* in 22:12–13? Because in the

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[1] Carol Meyers cautiously offers a rhetorical explanation: "It may simply be poetic: a way of emphasizing the middle term in a three-word alliteration: *'anashim 'achim 'anachnu*" (pers. comm.). That Abram might employ a rhetorical device when proposing a drastic course of action to his nephew does not preclude the explanation I have offered. Words are most persuasive when they also contribute to the plain meaning.

first instance *'ish* underscores that she is still living in her father's household; the expression there means "the daughter of a priestly householder."

II.C.1.d. I agree with the grammarians' assertion that *'ish* is a "generic noun," but I am asserting that the class it signifies is something other than "adult male." Indeed, in instances such as Judg. 6:8 and Lev. 21:9 that fact would have gone without saying. To which the typical grammarians' response would appear to be, "Well, that's just how biblical Hebrew works." Yet is that not a conclusion to be reached only when all other possibilities have been exhausted? The usages that I have identified in I.B. and II.B. far outnumber the few cases of "collocation of genus and species" cited in the grammars (and can account for most if not all of those cases), suggesting that my construct may have greater explanatory power than the classical grammarians' category.

II.C.2. *Source-Critical Solutions*

II.C.2.a. Critical scholars sometimes declare anomalous usages of *'ish* to be the result of later insertions or words out of place. For example, in Gen. 39:1 the text identifies Joseph's slave master, Potiphar, via three phrases in apposition: *potiphar seris par'oh sar ha-tabachim <u>'ish</u> mitzri* (RSV/NRSV: "Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian"). Claus Westermann takes *'ish mitzri* in the conventional way as "an Egyptian" (with *'ish* serving as a generic noun of class). But he echoes many who observe that "the real difficulty is that in a three-part note of this sort the *'ish mitzri* [a generalizing detail] should stand at the beginning." Stated another way, *'ish mitzri*, in its position at the end of the clause, cannot have the indefinite sense of "an Egyptian [man]," because its referent has already been definitely established. (This has not stopped some translators from rendering it as indefinite, however.) Like most critical scholars (e.g., Dillman, Skinner), Westermann dismisses the problem by declaring that the verse's prior designations (*potiphar seris par'oh sar ha-tabachim*) are a historically later insertion.

II.C.2.b. Blaming a clumsy redactor begs the question as to how the ancient audience would have construed the plain-sense meaning of the text as given. Let me suggest that the context would have evoked the posited "representative" sense of *'ish*, and that the phrase *'ish mitzri* is an explanatory gloss that is necessary because the preceding term, *sar ha-tabachim,* is not an attested Israelite office—and thus would have been obscure to the text's ancient audience. In context, our phrase means something like "an Egyptian (royal) representative."[2]

II.C.3. *Exegetical Solutions*

II.C.3.a. With regard to grammatically absolute usages, exegetes have other ways of accounting for *'ish*. For example, when I asked Professor Waltke how he construes *'anashim* in my first paradigmatic example (I.B.1; Gen. 12:20), he conceded that the sense of "deputies" was a possibility, but he preferred to view the instance as a figure of speech: "genus for the species" (pers. comm., 12/19/05). If I understand him correctly, he means that the narrator is being pointedly vague for effect. Yet what would the Torah's composer(s) gain in terms of literary power by withholding specificity or concreteness here? How does such a figure enrich the text?

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[2] Cf. *'ish mitzri* in 2 Sam. 23:21; *ha-'ish ha-mitzri* in 1 Chron. 11:23; *'ish* and *ha-pelishti* in 1 Sam. 17; and *ha-mitzri* in Gen. 39:2, 5.

II.C.3.b. The narrative context is in some cases consistent with a meaningful reading of *'ish* even according to a conventional understanding of the term. For my third paradigmatic example (Gen. 43:3), Reinier de Blois has played devil's advocate and countered that "maybe he [Judah] intended a little disrespect here . . . something like 'that guy . . .'" (pers. comm.). Yes, one's word choices can convey emotional distancing, and that is a possibility here (more so with *'ish* in verse 7, and less so in verse 14). In my view, however, because Judah is objecting to a direct order from his father—the head of the corporate household—he must nevertheless depict the unnamed official as "the authority in question." This argues against dismissing his wording as flippant.

II.C.3.c. De Blois also addresses my fourth paradigmatic example (Gen. 45:1), in which Joseph tells *kol 'ish* to leave the room. Reading again in terms of the story line, de Blois offers the argument that "since Joseph was obviously speaking Egyptian, the only people who were likely to respond to his command were those who understood the language." Such interpretation is foreclosed, however, by the very next phrase: the narrator echoes Joseph's words in an unmediated Hebrew notice to the audience, *we-lo' 'amad 'ish 'itto* (literally "and no *'ish* stood with him").

II.C.3.d. Some scholars would defend the conventional view of *'ish* as a "generic noun of class" by claiming that if the Bible had meant to use a more specific term in a particular passage, it could easily have done so. They would argue that because a more specific term was not employed, the more general term must be meant as such, even if the usage is syntactically conspicuous. Samuel A. Meier raised this argument with regard to *'anashim* in Gen. 18:2. Meier, who grants that *'anashim* can connote "emissaries" in some passages, argued that in this passage the vagueness of *'anashim* (relative to available synonyms) is literarily significant: it reflects Abraham's uncertainty or lack of awareness as to the identity of his three visitors (pers. comm.). My view is rather that the text gives ample contextual clues in Gen. 18:1–2 that would reliably evoke the sense of *'anashim* as "agents" in the minds of an ancient Israelite audience (and of Abraham's recognition as such); there was no need for further lexical specificity.[3]

II.C.3.e. In a similar argument, Edward Greenstein defended the conventional view of *'ish* as "adult male" in Num. 12:3 (where CJPS reads "leader") by noting that "there are words for 'leader' in Biblical Hebrew" and then reasoning that "if that were the intent, I think we would find one of those words here" (pers. comm.). In my view, the usage is syntactically too conspicuous for the meaning of "adult male"; and in this narrative context, the composer(s) have little to gain by being so pointedly vague in referring to Moses. For readers to construe a word as relatively meaningless or superfluous should be an interpretive strategy of last resort.

II.C.3.f. Another line of argument might be called theological. Consider the case of definite usage that I have classed under "the authority in question," in Exod. 11:3—

וַיִּתֵּ֧ן יְהוָ֛ה אֶת־חֵ֥ן הָעָ֖ם	The LORD gave the people favor
בְּעֵינֵ֣י מִצְרָ֑יִם	in the sight of the Egyptians.
גַּ֣ם ׀ הָאִ֣ישׁ מֹשֶׁ֗ה גָּד֤וֹל מְאֹד֙	Moreover, Moses himself was a man (*'ish*) of great importance
בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרַ֔יִם	in the land of Egypt,
בְּעֵינֵ֥י עַבְדֵֽי־פַרְעֹ֖ה	in the sight of Pharaoh's officials
וּבְעֵינֵ֥י הָעָֽם׃	and in the sight of the people. (RSV/NRSV)

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[3] In other words, Abraham does recognize his visitors as divine envoys, as I hope to discuss later on.

In this passage, *'ish* is conspicuous in that the word can be omitted without syntactic penalty, and it is apparently superfluous when construed as "adult male." Bruce Waltke's posited explanation is that this verse is "perhaps contrasting Moses, a man, [who] was held in higher honor than their god—Pharaoh" (pers. comm.). In my view, that contrast with a deity is merely implicit and thus is probably not a plain-sense reading.[4] Nor does it account for the construction "*ha-'ish* + personal name" in passages in which no such contrast is evident: Num. 12:3 (Moses as national leader); 1 Kings 11:28 (Jeroboam as project manager); Esther 9:4 (Mordecai as vizier); and Dan. 9:21 (Gabriel—a divine being!—as archangel or authoritative source). I submit that in the immediate context of Exod. 11:3, the plain sense of *ha-'ish mosheh* is something like "their leader, Moses."[5]

II.D. Medieval Grammarians and Commentators

As mentioned in Part I, recent dictionaries seem oblivious to the five senses of *'ish* that I have identified above. However, earlier students of the Bible noticed at least some of those senses, in at least some passages. As with the biblical citations, I have not conducted an exhaustive literature search; rather, I now cite a few remarks, listed chronologically, in order to suggest that the lexical issue I am calling attention to has been observed in the past.

II.D.1. *Rabbi Jonah Ibn Janah.* Circa 1030, the grammarian Jonah Ibn Janah composed a pioneering dictionary of biblical Hebrew, written in Arabic as *Kitab al-Utsul*.[6] The format is terse; for each entry he glosses meanings that are supported by a few biblical citations. In his entry for *'ish*, relevant notations include:

- בְּאַמַּת־אִישׁ *By the cubit of an <u>'ish</u>* (Deut. 3:11)—"by the cubit of the rest of humankind, that is, not his [the giant's] cubit, whose forearm must have been larger than the forearm of the rest of humankind, being proportional to the size of his body relative to their bodies." In other words, the context evokes the sense of *'ish* as a typical, "representative" person.

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[4] Contrast 7:1, in which Moses is explicitly *'elohim* [a god] in relation to Pharaoh.

[5] Cf. the expression *ha-melekh david*, which appears 18 times in the Bible, e.g, 2 Samuel 5:3.

A theologically tinged approach similarly lay behind my own treatment of *'anashim* in Numbers 22 in the revised edition *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (2005). I had argued there against reading as "adult males," which would have gone without saying. I rendered the term contextually in verse 20 as "personages," on the grounds that the speaker was God who was expressing ironically solicitous concern for Balaam's honor. Then in verse 35, I rendered as "mortals," for the speaker was an angel with drawn sword who warned that Balaam had nearly escaped death; in my perception, that situation highlighted human mortality in contrast with divine beings, strengthened by verbal allusions to Jacob's experiences with angels in Gen. 28:13, 16 and 32:25–29. However, my view changed after I became aware of an agency sense of *'ish*; I now believe that the narrative context would evoke that agency sense in the textual foreground, while the other nuances of *'anashim*—rich as they are—only occupy the background. Thus CJPS renders both instances as "envoys."

[6] Judah ibn Tibbon translated this work into Hebrew as *Sefer ha-Shorashim* in 1171 (published in 1894). Ibn Janah's work was highly influential, serving as a main source for the famous plain-sense rabbinic commentators Abraham Ibn Ezra and David Kimhi (Radak).

• "When [the Midianites] said גִּדְעוֹן בֶּן־יוֹאָשׁ אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל *Gideon son of Joash, 'ish of Israel* (Judg. 7:14), they meant the leader of Israel—their head and eminence. And likewise [when David said to Saul's army commander, Abner], הֲלוֹא־אִישׁ אַתָּה וּמִי כָמוֹךָ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל *Are you not an 'ish? Who is like you in Israel?* (1 Sam. 26:15), its sense is: "Are you not the head and leader?" In other words, the context of such instances evokes the sense of *'ish* as "the authority in question."

II.D.2. *Rabbi Solomon Itzhaki (Rashi).* A generation later, the most famous Jewish commentator, Rashi, is attributed with a generalization at Num. 13:3b, רָאשֵׁי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה כֻּלָּם אֲנָשִׁים *all of them being 'anashim—they were the chiefs of the people of Israel.*[7] He tersely yet provocatively comments: כל אנשים שבמקרא לשון חשיבות "Every [instance of] the word *'anashim* in the Bible connotes [social] prominence."

Sometimes in the Bible and in rabbinic literature, the word *kol* does not literally mean "every" but rather "many" or "typically." That seems likely to be the case with this comment of Rashi's. Indeed, circa 1680, Shabbatai the Bass-Singer offers clarification in his supercommentary on Rashi (*Siftei Chakhamim*: "That is, every instance of *'anashim* not otherwise qualified connotes [social] prominence; and also when the word is brought in place of an adjective, such as in this case and also [when King David charges his son Solomon as heir to the throne by saying] וְחָזַקְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ *be strong and be an 'ish* [1 Kings 2:2]." In other words, the context of such instances evokes the sense of *'ish* as "the authority in question."

II.D.3. *Rabbi Moses ben Nahman ("Nahmanides" or "Ramban").* Circa 1260, Nahmanides characterized how *'ish* is sometimes collocated with the noun *na'ar*, in his comment to Exod. 33:11. He wrote:

ועל דעתי דרך לשון הקדש	"In my opinion, it is the way of the holy tongue [that is, Hebrew]
שיקרא כל משרת נער	to refer to a typical attendant as *na'ar,*
כי בעל השררה הנכבד	while the esteemed authority
הוא האיש	is [called] the *'ish.*"

In other words, the context can evokes the sense of *'ish* as "the authority in question."

II.D.4. *Rabbenu Bachya ben Asher.* Beginning at Gen. 24:21, Abraham's emissary is referred to seven times in a row as *ha-'ish*, whereas until that point he was designated five times as *'eved* ("servant").[8] The linguistic shift comes at the moment he takes initiative to fulfill his mission. Writing in 1291, Bachya ben Asher explains the usage in the plain-sense portion of his commentary (at 24:15): the servant here "executes the role of the divine messenger" whom Abraham had mentioned earlier (v. 7). Rabbenu Bachya cites the expression *ha-'ish* as applied to the angel Gabriel (Daniel 9:21) and to the agent who approaches Joseph (Gen. 37:17). In other words, the context in Genesis evokes what I am calling the agency sense of *'ish*.

II.D.5. *Rabbi Obadiah Sforno.* Circa 1525, in his commentary at Gen. 18:2, Obadiah Sforno explains why Abraham bows to three *'anashim* whom he sees: "because their form was awe-inspiring (citing Judg. 13:6, which describes divine messengers as such), and he thought that

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[7] The comment appears in most printed editions of Rashi's commentary, although not in the first edition.

[8] The shift in designation at verse 21 is underscored by two instances of alliteration and assonance within the verse: "*we-ha-'ish mishta'eh lah macharish lada'at . . .*"

they were emissaries from some king or other." That is, the context evokes an agency sense that is inherent in the term *'anashim*; it can be a synonym of "messenger."

II.E. Extrabiblical Evidence

Initial investigation suggests that the posited senses of *'ish* are consistent with usages in extrabiblical Hebrew and in related languages.

II.E.1. *Agent.* Evidence for an agency sense in other ancient Near Eastern texts is robust. It both precedes and postdates most of the biblical evidence.[9]

II.E.1.a. In the pre-biblical period, the Akkadian language (and its Babylonian and Assyrian offshoots) is relevant; it was the medium of international communication in Mesopotamia and the Levant for a thousand years.[10] Thus the Akkadian influence on Western Semitic languages such as Hebrew can be expected to be relatively strong in two fields in which agency plays a key role: diplomacy and governance.

II.E.1.b. *Old Babylonian Period.* An early second-millennium cuneiform letter found at the site of the Canaanite town of Taanach employs "man" in an agency sense: "I will send my man to you and I will verily make a marriage agreement [via that agent]."[11] In other Old Babylonian letters, "man" similarly refers to a messenger or agent—that is, someone authorized to speak or act on behalf of the sender.[12] A letter from the archive of the Mesopotamian city of Mari twice uses the same term for an emissary's official escort,[13] while in other Mari letters the same term designates a messenger.[14] At Ugarit in northern Canaan, similar instances are extant.[15] These usages lie within the broader semantic category listed in *The Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD): "designation of a person in relation to another person [or] to an organization."[16]

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[9] I have not found extrabiblical evidence that is contemporaneous with the Torah, i.e., pre-exilic. Neither the sparse extant epigraphic Hebrew texts nor other known Northwest Semitic inscriptions of the pre-exilic biblical period offer examples of *'ish* used clearly in an agency sense (*A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* [1998]; *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* [1994]).

[10] Akkadian is a Semitic language less closely related to Hebrew than is Aramaic or Arabic. The cognate of *'ish* in the Old Babylonian dialect of Akkadian [1950–1530 B.C.E.] is *awilu(m)*; in the Middle Babylonian dialect [1530–1000 B.C.E.], it's *amilu,* and in construct *amel.* Concurrent with Middle Babylonian, an artificial written form of the language known as Standard Babylonian [1500–500 B.C.E.] continued to imitate the Old dialect. At the same time, a peripheral dialect of Akkadian thrived in the Levant.

[11] Taanach 2.22–24. Transl. Anson Rainey. (I have added the insertion in brackets for clarity.)

[12] *AbB* VI:57:7–20; VI:154.10. Quoted by Samuel Meier in his *The Messenger in the Ancient Semitic World* (1988), pp. 24, 111.

[13] *ARM* 78.14, 16. Quoted in A. Malamat, "Hazor . . ." *JBL* 79 [1960], pp. 13–14, who describes this functionary as "a local representative of the people to whom the mission had been sent."

[14] James F. Ross, "The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger," *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* [1962], p. 100, citing Martin Noth, "History and the Word of God in the O.T.," *BJRL* 32 [1949–50], pp. 197–198. The sense as "messenger" can be seen in Mari texts *ARM* I 39.17'r and II 10.4'r; quoted in Meier, op. cit., p. 25.

[15] PRU III 15–16 l.22–31, PRU IV 196–7. Quoted in Meier, op. cit., pp. 92–93.

[16] S.v. *amilu,* 4a–c.

II.E.1.c. *Amarna Period.* In the 14th-century-B.C.E. Amarna letters dealing with relations between the governments of Egypt and other lands (written in Akkadian), the same term was employed in the sense of agency, such as in the office of *amel rabitz,* "royal deputy, commissioner," and as a synonym for "envoy." Thus a vassal ruler of the coastal city of Gubla (north of Beirut) wrote pharaoh about what happened after "my 'man' arrived from the king," and he also lamented that "no 'man' of the king" had brought a reply to his urgent missives.[17] Likewise, the ruler of Alashia (Cyprus) referred to his royal envoys as "men."[18] Again, this usage is not restricted to the "peripheral" pidgin of Western Semites but also is attested in normative Middle Babylonian: in writing to the pharaoh, the king of Babylon refers to each of his two waylaid messengers as "man."[19,20]

II.E.1.d. *Postbiblical evidence.* In the early Persian period (e.g., 459 B.C.E. and 420 B.C.E.), Jews in the military colony at Elephantine (Egypt), writing in Aramaic, were clearly employing the Hebrew word *'ish* in the sense of "one who represents another":[21]

<div dir="rtl">

לא אכהל אנה אוריה ובר ברה לי . . . ואיש לי יכבשנהי עבד

</div>

Neither I—Uriah—nor a son or daughter of mine, . . .

nor an *'ish* of mine, can oppress him [i.e., Yedoniah] [again] as a slave.

II.E.2. *Householder.* I have not sought extrabiblical evidence in support of this sense.

II.E.3. *Authority*

II.E.3.a. In a well-attested usage in Akkadian documents found at El-Amarna, the cognate of *'ish* appears in construct with the name of a town, designating the native local ruler. William Moran distinguishes this expression from a synonym: "If the place of rule was indicated, one usually did not use *chazannu* ["mayor"] but *awilu*." The genitive evoked for *awilu* the sense not of "the adult male" but rather of "the authority." Moran further explains that this usage "goes back to the Syrian *koine* of Old Babylonian times (see *CAD*, A/2, p. 57b)"; it had disappeared from Mesopotamia proper by the Amarna period, yet it was retained by the provincial scribes in the

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[17] *EA* 92.16–24; 138.30–93. *The Amarna Letters,* ed. and transl. William L. Moran (1992).

[18] *EA* 40.16, 24.

[19] *EA* 8.34–42. Furthermore, extrabiblical evidence shows that one of the peoples living in central Palestine prior to the emergence of Israel were the Hurrians. Therefore even the (non-Semitic) Hurrian language may be germane to Hebrew usage. And in an Amarna-era letter written in Hurrian, the king of Mitanni—northeast of Syria—praises pharaoh's visiting envoy by saying "there does not exist a 'man' like [him] in all the world" (*EA* 24.17.95–6).

[20] On the basis of the Amarna letters alone, Alan Crown speculated in 1974 that "it is most likely that the biblical Hebrew word *'ish* is . . . used on occasion with the sense of . . . agent for another" ("An Alternative Meaning for *'ish* in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 24/1 [1974], p. 110). Lack of space constrained Crown from proposing any particular biblical instances [pers. comm.]. See also his "Messengers and Scribes" in the same issue, p. 367.

[21] *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions* 1:119.2d; see the multiple citations there. Adduced here is a document of manumission, Kraeling Papyrus 8.4–5 (416 B.C.E.), which is translated in *Context of Scripture* 3.77.

Levant "perhaps . . . because of analogues in their own native language."[22] In other words, the peripheral Akkadian usage of *awilu* to refer to an authority suggests that in West Semitic (Hebrew-like) languages, *'ish* was already employed in such a manner. The usage is also found in documents from Taanach and from Mari, according to Anton Jirku. In brief notes, both he and Alan Crown have proposed that this usage is also reflected in the Bible, where *'ish* is used with the sense of "governor, prince, king, or leader."[23]

II.E.3.b. The word *'ish* appears seldom in extant pre-exilic Hebrew ostraca (ink on pottery sherds). Of those instances, I submit that "the authority in question" fits the context of *h'y$* in Arad 40:7 (where "$" represents the letter *shin*) better than does "adult male."

II.E.3.c. *Postbiblical Evidence.* The Mishnah (ca. 200 C.E.) uses *'ish* as a term of authority. A priest is quoted in seven cases (e.g., *Yoma* 1:3, *Tamid* 6:3) as addressing the high priest as *'ishi kohen gadol* (rather than a synonym such as *'adoni,* "my lord"). Furthermore, the Mishnah frequently identifies an individual via the construction "*'ish*+(Town Name)"; according to some medieval interpreters (e.g., R. Menahem Meiri), such an expression refers to the mayor.

II.E.3.d. In late antiquity, Samaritan Targums sometimes employed the word *'ish* rather than the Aramaic *gavra'* ("man") to refer to "a person of special position." Samaritan Hebrew liturgists in the late Middle Ages would also occasionally refer to such a person as an *'ish*.[24]

II.E.4. *Subordinate.* In pre-exilic Hebrew ostraca, "subordinates" fits better than "adult males" as the sense of *h'n$m* (that is, *ha-'anashim*) in Arad 24:19, and of *'n$w* (that is, *'anashim* with possessive suffix) in Lachish 3:18.

II.E.5. *Representative.* I have not sought extrabiblical evidence in support of this sense.

II.F. Lexicons and dictionaries

II.F.1. Here in Part II, I have shown that the five paradigmatic instances cited in Part I are far from unique; they are not the result of an editorial slip or a scribal error. The inferred meanings are not mere connotations, nor are they innovative metaphoric coinages. Rather, the usages are so widespread that the best explanation for them is that they are part of what *'ish* denoted in everyday Hebrew at the time that the Bible was composed. That is, the biblical text was merely using the word in its normal fashion, relying on its original audience to already be familiar with these usages as a normal part of what *'ish* meant. Some of the posited senses were mentioned by previous scholars, and some are supported by extrabiblical evidence. Let us now return to the field of lexicography and recall that none of our five contextually derived meanings was mentioned in four relatively recent reference works published in English.[25]

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[22] Moran, p. xxvii, n. 73; p. xix.

[23] Jirku, "Der 'Mann von Tob' (II Sam. 10:6.8)," *ZAW* 62 (1950), p. 319; Crown, "Alternative Meaning."

[24] Abraham Tal, pers. comm. "A person of special position" is the second gloss in Tal's *Dictionary of Samaritan Aramaic* (2000), s.v. *'ish*, vol. 1, page 25. Tal views Exod. 32:1 and Num. 12:3 as biblical instances in which the Torah uses *'ish* denotatively with this meaning (Alan Crown, pers. comm.).

[25] Consideration of the BDB (1906) does not materially alter the findings. Even though it is still popular among students of the Bible, in this memorandum I have usually not cited it because it is a century old. More recent works should have managed to improve upon it, but they do not appear to have done so.

II.F.2. Here, for convenience, I summarize entries for *'ish* in those four works cited in Part I.

II.F.2.a. HALOT (1967): (*1*) **man** (vs. woman, animal, God), **manly one**; (*2*) **husband**; (*3*) indication of rank: **distinguished people; governor**; (*4*) **human being**; (*5*) indicates a position, occupation, public office [*with apposition or in construct*]; (*6*) *'ish 'elohim* **man of God**; (*7*) (pl.) in association with someone; (*8*) association within a community; (*9*) **somebody**; (*10*) each; (*11*) to express reciprocity : each other; (*12*) every : **each one** in his turn.

II.F.2.b. TDOT (1974): (1) **man** (secular use): (*1a*) denoting the sex, in contrast to woman; (*1b*) **adult man**, in contrast to young man, youth, or old man; (*1c*) to emphasize masculine qualities—physical or spiritual; (*1d*) to designate an office, profession, or rank held by men; (*1e*) to indicate that one was of a certain nationality or tribe, or to indicate inhabitants of a land, city, or house; (*1f*) **someone, one; each**; (*2*) **husband** (secular use); (*3*) **mankind** (secular use): (*3a*) the species, which includes "man" and "woman"; (*3b*) human; to indicate something that is usual or common; (*4*) **mankind** (theological or anthropological use): (*4a*) in contrast to God; (*4b*) in contrast to animals; (*5*) **man,** as sharing the same nature as woman.

II.F.2.c. TWOT (1980): (*1*) connotes primarily the concept of man as an individual; (*2*) most commonly denotes any individual male; (*3*) less frequently it connotes "male" as distinct from female, or man in his sexual role; (*4*) used in many technical expressions; (*5*) Frequently, an individualizing element connoting "each"; (*6*) In a broadly inclusive sense—"whoever"; (*7*) commonly, "husband."

II.F.2.d. DCH (1993): (*1a*) usu. **man, person,** oft. without contextual emphasis on gender; (*1b*) distributively, **each**, of individuals; (*1c*) distributively, **each**, of groups, objects, tribes; (*2*) **one, someone**, similar to indefinite pronoun; (*3*) **man, husband,** as distinct from woman; (*4*) **armed man, warrior** [*in construct*]; (*5*) oft. **servant, member of retinue**, always plural (sic).

II.F.3. *Discussion*

II.F.3.a. Among lexicographers, the semantic analysis of *'ish* (and its effective plural, *'anashim*) has yielded untidy results. Philologists and lexicographers have not settled on the term's primary meaning, nor its various secondary senses. The four works cited do employ different organizing principles and have different goals; and the latter work covers texts other than the Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, the following contrasts are salient. In HALOT, TDOT, and TWOT, "man" (i.e., male) is the primary sense, while "human being" is secondary; conversely, in DCH "person" is primary while the distinctly male sense is secondary. Meanwhile, HALOT and TDOT recognize a sense of "rank," whereas TWOT and DCH do not. And though DCH reports a sense of subordination that HALOT calls an association, TDOT and TWOT do not mention either one.

II.F.3.a. It is not necessarily the task of a lexicon or dictionary to indicate a logical relationship between primary and secondary senses, or between denotation and connotation. But the apparent disarray in the field raises a fundamental question: How are the various senses of *'ish* related to each other? That question is the subject of Part III.

Thus ends Part II of a projected seven-part series.