

# The Syntax of Saying “Yes” in Biblical Hebrew

EDWARD L. GREENSTEIN  
Jewish Theological Seminary

The sentence is complete: it is precisely that language which is complete.—Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

As we shall see, and as others have seen, there is a way of affirming a positive answer to a question in Biblical Hebrew. There is, however, no way precisely to say “yes.” The particle *hēn*, it has been suggested,<sup>2</sup> approximates the sense of “yes” in Gen. 30:34, where Laban agrees to Jacob’s terms concerning the distribution of the former’s sheep and goats. Laban says: *hēn lū yāhī xiḏv̄rex̄*, which the New Jewish Version (J.P.S.) renders as “Very well, let it be as you say.” Laban’s remark, however, does not respond to a yes-or-no question and can be taken as no different from the general usage of *hēn* to reinforce or emphasize an assertion, as in Gen. 47:23: *hēn qānīthī ʔeθ̄χem hayyōm . . .* “I am indeed purchasing you today. . . .” This is the way *hēn* is treated in the careful analysis by Muraoka.<sup>3</sup> Taking into consideration the derivation of *hēn* from the demonstrative pronoun, Muraoka explains that *hēn* serves to call attention to an assertion or observation.

The same may be said for the particle *kī*. Related to other demonstrative derivatives like *kēn* and *kō*,<sup>4</sup> *kī* never functions alone as a positive reply to a question but

---

The present study is the most recently completed one of several I have been doing on syntactic deletion in Northwest Semitic (see n. 40 below for some references). I was introduced to the entire topic of what Medieval Hebrew grammarians called *mōšex ʕašmō wəʔaḥēr ʕimmō* (double duty) and *ʕōmed bimqōm šnāyim* (stands for two) by Professor Moshe Held, to whose memory this publication is dedicated. Very helpful research was provided by Eliezer Herzog. I presented an earlier version of this study at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society in March 1986. Preparation of this article was supported by the Toby and Carl Sloane Publication Fund of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

1 R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, tr. R. Miller (New York, 1975), 50.

2 Cf., e.g., S. Mandelkern, *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae hebraicae et chaldaicae* (Leipzig, 1896), 334; C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen, 1956), §4; R. Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik, III: Satzlehre*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, 1972), 86. This would also seem to be the understanding of *hēn* by those medieval exegetes who interpreted *wattāhīnū* in Deut. 1:41 as “they said ‘yes’ [*hēn*]”; see Rashi, Rashbam, and Ibn Ezra ad loc., and cf. J. Faur, “Delocutive Expressions in the Hebrew Liturgy,” *JANES* 16–17 (1984–1985) = *Ancient Studies in Memory of Elias Bickerman*, 41–54, at 43. Note, in light of the present discussion, that both Rashi and Rashbam relate *hēn* to the demonstrative usage, as though the speakers were saying *hinnēnū*, “here we are.”

3 T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem, 1985), 137ff.; cf., e.g., Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax*, §51.

4 Cf., e.g., J. Muilenburg, “The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle ׀ in the Old Testament,” *HUCA* 32 (1961), 135–60, at 136 and passim; Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 159 and passim.

often serves asseveratively, to strengthen the force of a statement (e.g., Gen. 18:15; Job 6:22).<sup>5</sup> As the English word “yes” evolved from an original demonstrative (so the *OED*), so did BH *hēn* and *kēn* develop into terms for “yes” in later Hebrew; but in the Bible no such function is attested.

In Akkadian, demonstratives developed into specific words for “yes,” *anna* and *annu*.<sup>6</sup> The expression *anna/annu apālu* means “to answer ‘yes’,” e.g.:

*ina puḥri īpulū anna/rabūtum* <sup>d</sup>*Anunna pāqidū šimāti*

In the (divine) assembly answered “yes”

The great ones, the Anunnaki, who administer destinies.<sup>7</sup>

*tēreṭi kī pī ištēn indaḥḥarāma ēpulū’inni annu kēnu*

The omens all agreed with each other, so (the gods) answered me a firm “yes” . . .<sup>8</sup>

There is, however, another way to respond affirmatively to a yes-or-no question in Akkadian. It is attested, for example, in the dialogue between Gilgamesh and Enkidu when the latter had been resurrected from the netherworld in Gilg. XII:<sup>9</sup>

(Q.) *ša eḫimmašu pāqida lā iṣū tāmur?* (A.) *ātamar*

(Q.) Him whose spirit has no one attending it have you seen? (A.) I have seen. (line 153)

Compare, too:

(Q.) *ša šalamtašu ina ṣēri nadāt tāmur?* (A.) *ātam[ar]*

(Q.) Him whose corpse has been thrown onto the steppe have you seen? (A.) I have seen.  
(line 151)

The positive reply is conveyed not by the word “yes” but by the respondent’s repetition of the verb from the question with conversion to the appropriate grammatical form. In fact, within a transformational theory of grammar one could explain the reply “I have seen” as an instance of syntactic deletion. That is, the response of “yes” to the question “Have you seen X?” is “I have seen [X],” with X deleted optionally.

This manner of replying in the affirmative to a yes-or-no question is widely attested in Indo-European languages. For example, in Sanskrit the question “Have you made the mat, Devadatta?” receives the reply, “Yes, I have made.”<sup>10</sup> The reply can also be abbreviated as in Lithuanian: “Did you give the boy the book? Yes, I gave.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly, the response is a deleted form of the full sentence, “I gave the boy the book,” or, with pronominal substitutions, “I gave it to him.” In Brythonic, as in the above

5 Cf., too, the derivation of *lāxēn* in its usage of “Not so, (but)” or “That being so, (then) . . .”; see W. E. March, “*Lākēn*: Its Functions and Meanings,” in J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler, eds., *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (Pittsburgh, 1974), 256–84.

6 Cf. *CAD* A/2, 125 and 134–36, respectively. Cf. also the pronoun *annū* in *ibid.*, 136–42.

7 Lambert-Millard, *Atrahasis*, 59:218–20.

8 Borger, *Esarḫ.*, p. 82: rev. 23.

9 Thompson, *Gilgamish*, p. 70.

10 Cited in W. Dressler, “Über die Rekonstruktion der indogermanischen Syntax,” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 85 (1971), 5–22, at 19. Thanks to Jared Klein for pointing me to the reference.

11 *Ibid.*, 20.

Akkadian illustration, the affirmative reply can be made by the deleted utterance alone, without a word for "yes," as in: "Didn't you see it? I saw."<sup>12</sup>

The same phenomenon is attested in English. The reply to the question "Have you been swimming?" can be "Yes, I have," where the response is a deleted form of "Yes, I have been swimming."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the response "yes" by itself implies an affirmative formulation of the sentence embodied in the question.<sup>14</sup> This claim can be supported by considering certain variations on the affirmative reply. One possible, and at times appropriate, response to the question "Are they married?" is "Yes, happily." The abbreviated response represents a deleted form of underlying "Yes, they are happily married."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, the phenomenon, more properly the transformation, has been called "Answer Deletion."<sup>16</sup> The deleted linguistic constituents are present in the deep structure of the reply and can be presupposed<sup>17</sup> by the respondent, who may amplify the utterance as though one were building on it directly. Thus, one may reply to the question "Do you like to swim?" by saying, "Yes, and to dive." The underlying sentence is clearly: "Yes, I like to swim, and (I like) to dive."<sup>18</sup>

That the correspondence between question and answer must occur on the abstract level of deep structure is suggested by cases in which there is lexical variation between the two. Thus, for example, the appropriate response to the question "Has Aarne seen any action lately?" is not "Yes, Aarne has seen *any* action lately" but rather "Yes, Aarne has seen *some* action lately."<sup>19</sup>

Yes-or-no questions and their answers are closely related syntactically to questions of other types. Consider the question "What is Hasan writing?" It is unnecessary to respond in full, "Hasan is writing a letter"; one may rather abbreviate, "A letter." This apparent fragment is, of course, a deleted form of "Hasan is writing a letter," where the noun phrase "a letter" replaces the question word.<sup>20</sup> Such replacement may take place in yes-or-no questions as well. The question "Did Harry find the anaconda?" may prompt a negative reply such as, "No, Harvey," a deleted form of "No, Harvey found the anaconda."<sup>21</sup> We shall soon see that answers to yes-or-no questions operate similarly in Biblical Hebrew. A negative answer for the most part takes the form: *lō*? . . . A positive answer is expressed through a reformulation of the interrogative sentence as a declarative sentence, with varying amounts of deletion. It is similar to the example from Akkadian cited above, and to the illustrations from English and elsewhere in Indo-European—except that in BH there is no word for "yes."

12 Loc. cit. Brythonic comprises Welsh, Bretonian, and extinct Cornish; P. Baldi, "Indo-European Languages," in B. Comrie, ed., *The World's Major Languages* (New York, 1987), 42.

13 M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London, 1976), 167.

14 So, e.g., *ibid.*, 209.

15 E. Pope, "Answers to Yes-No Questions," *Linguistic Inquiry* 2 (1971), 69–82, at 69.

16 *Ibid.*, 75. Cf., e.g., I. A. Sag, *Deletion and Logical Form* (Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1977), esp. 215–24.

17 Halliday and Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, 144 and *passim*.

18 Pope, "Answers to Yes-No Questions," 75.

19 *Ibid.*, 76. The presence of deleted linguistic material in deep structure is also suggested by the fact that speakers retain access to "gap-fillers" "even beyond the point at which the gap is recognized"; E. Engdahl, "Interpreting Questions," in D. R. Dowty et al., eds., *Natural Language Parsing* (Cambridge, 1985), 67–93, at 68.

20 J. Hankamer, *Deletion in Coordinate Structures* (New York, 1979), 393; cf., e.g., B. Comrie, *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology* (Chicago, 1981), 58–59.

21 Hankamer, *Deletion*, 396–98.

Research into BH syntax has until now managed to describe, at least collectively, the various aspects of the phenomenon. It has not, however, properly explained it. To illustrate, we shall use as an example Exod. 2:7–8. Baby Moses' vigilant sister takes the following initiative with Pharaoh's daughter:

*hāʔēlex wəqārēθī l̄x ʔiṣṣṣ mēneqeθ min h̄ṣivriyyōθ wəθēnīq l̄x ʔeθ ḥawwēleḏ*

Shall I go and summon for you a wetnurse from the Hebrew women so that she might nurse the boy for you?

Pharaoh's daughter answers "yes" by saying: *lēxī*, "Go!"

Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley describes the linguistic operation involved in this way: "The affirmative answer is generally expressed, as in Latin, by repeating the emphatic word in the question. . . ." <sup>22</sup> In this and other examples, however, it is by no means clear that the repeated word is the especially stressed one. In the present example, one could easily argue that summoning the wetnurse is at least as important and perhaps more so than going to find her. And if one were to maintain that going must be more important than summoning because that is the term that is repeated, one would be arguing in a rather obvious and uninteresting circle.

The Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley explanation fails, too, for the reason that Joüon's does. Joüon states that in an affirmative answer the word following the interrogative particle is repeated. <sup>23</sup> This explanation is too narrow. It may account for those instances in which a single word from the question is repeated in the response, e.g.:

*ḥayəḏaʕtem ʔeθ l̄ṣv̄n . . . yṣḏṣ̄nū* (Gen. 29:5)

Do you know Laban . . . ? . . . We know.

It does not, however, reckon with cases in which several words from the question are reproduced in the answer, e.g.:

*hāḏōrīḏēnī ʔel ḥaggəḏūḏ ḥazzē . . . wəʔōrīḏəxṣ̄ ʔel ḥaggəḏūḏ ḥazzē* (1 Sam. 30:15)

Will you lead me down to that band? . . . And I will lead you down to that band. <sup>24</sup>

Although, as Joüon also says, <sup>25</sup> the reply maintains the word order of the question, this particular response follows a lengthy elaboration preceding the direct answer; it is represented above by the ellipsis. In any case, far more than repetition of the word after the interrogative is involved.

Speiser proposed a somewhat less informative but at the same time more precise description of the phenomenon: "Since biblical Hebrew lacks a word for 'yes,' it can only express affirmation by restating the question in positive terms." <sup>26</sup> Speiser, however, does not describe the variety of affirmative responses, nor any principle, such as Joüon's observation on duplication of word order, that would explain which words from the question must/are reproduced in the response. Similarly, when Davidson

<sup>22</sup> GKC §150n; cf., e.g., R.D. Wilson, *Notes on Hebrew Syntax* (privately printed, 1892), 42; Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik III*, 86. Many grammars neglect the phenomenon altogether, e.g., W. Richter, *Grundlagen einer althebräischen Grammatik* (St. Ottilien, 1979), 179–80, which deals with questions.

<sup>23</sup> P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (Rome, 1923), 498.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the NJV.

<sup>25</sup> Joüon, *Grammaire*, 469.

<sup>26</sup> E. A. Speiser, *Genesis, AB I* (Garden City, NY, 1964), 222, on Gen. 29:5–6; cf. *ibid.*, 130; so, too, H. M. Orlinsky, ed., *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia, 1969), 102, 108; S. Grayzel,

writes that "the *answer* is usually made by repeating part of the question, or by the use of some word suggested by it,"<sup>27</sup> he makes it sound as though the respondent had the freedom to reproduce whichever words from the question one wanted. Rather, as we shall see, by understanding an affirmative reply to a yes-or-no question in BH within a transformational theory of syntactic deletion, we shall be able to explain the various aspects of the phenomenon that earlier critics have observed.

I would explain an affirmative response to a yes-or-no question in BH as a positive restatement of the surface structure of the entire question with the (oft-taken) option of deleting anything following the first word in the surface structure. Thus, in the example concerning the wetnurse (Exod. 2:7–8), in her reply Pharaoh's daughter repeated, with the necessary morphological modification, only the first word of the question and then deleted the rest of the sentence. The entire answer would have been: \**lēxī wəqāršō lī ʔiššō mēneqēθ min hōʔivriyyōθ wəθēnīq lī ʔēθ hayyšlēδ*, "Go and summon for me a woman, a wetnurse, from the Hebrew women that she might nurse the boy for me!" Part of this complete structure, certainly more than Pharaoh's daughter used, is adduced in the ensuing discourse of the narrator:

*wattēlex hōʔalmō wattiqrš ʔēθ ʔem hayyšlēδ*  
She went, the maiden did, and summoned the boy's mother.

Indeed, we have in Biblical prose a full range of affirmative replies to questions, from those in which the answer restates nearly all the question to those in which only the first word is produced. In fact, there is even an instance in which none of the question is repeated, leading us to acknowledge the relevance of deep structure to the phenomenon. Let us begin with the most complete pattern. In 1 Sam. 23:2 David asks YHWH:

*hāʔēlex wəhikkēθī bappālīšīm hōʔellē*  
Shall I go and smite these Philistines?

YHWH replies:

*lex wəhikkēθō vappālīšīm*  
Go and smite the Philistines!

Only the demonstrative pronoun *hōʔellē* is deleted. It is worth noting at this point, though, that in making his reply to David's query, YHWH adds an elaboration:

*lex wəhikkēθō vappālīšīm wəhōšaʔō ʔēθ qəʔīlō*  
Go and smite the Philistines and rescue Qeilah!

Such additions are fairly common, as in some of the English examples cited above. A complete, largely undeleted formulation of a reply to a question is quite rare in the Bible. Because the respondent operates on the underlying structure of the full sentence embodied in the question, one not only can add to the structure, one can modify it. In 2 Sam. 5:19 David asks YHWH a twofold question:

<sup>27</sup> "The Bible and I—A Translator Reflects," *Sh'ma* 7/123 (Dec. 10, 1976), 17–19, at 18. Contrast, e.g., B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin, 1934), 583, who interprets the brevity of the one-word responses as signs of the characters' indolence.

27 A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh, 1902), 168.

*haʔeʕēlē ʕel pəlištīm? hāθittanēm bəyṣḏī?*

Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them to me (lit., my hand)?

The underlying forms of the two questions are not exactly as they appear on the surface. They are something like the following:

(a) I shall attack the Philistines.

(b) You will deliver the Philistines to me.

In (b) the noun-phrase “the Philistines” is replaced by a pronominal suffix on the verb. YHWH’s response deletes the object noun-phrase “the Philistines” from (a) and reproduces the full nominal object from (b) prior to its replacement by a pronoun:

*ʕālē kī nṣḏōn ʕetten ʕeθ happəlištīm bəyṣḏéxṣ (2 Sam. 5:19)*

Attack, for I am delivering, yes, delivering the Philistines to you!

That such elaborative transformations are made on the deep structures posited above is supported by the parallel passage in 1 Chr. 14:10, where the object noun-phrase “the Philistines” is expressed in the surface structure only in its first occurrence, and is replaced by a pronoun both in the second part of David’s query and in both parts of YHWH’s reply:

*haʔeʕēlē ʕal pəlištīm ūnəθattīm bəyṣḏī?*

Shall I attack the Philistines, and will you deliver them to me?

*ʕālē ūnəθattīm bəyṣḏéxṣ*

Attack, and I shall deliver them to you!

The most extensive instance of deletion within answers to yes-or-no questions comes, a bit ironically, from the chapter in which we found the example with the least deletion. In 1 Sam. 23:11–12 David poses two questions concerning his fate at the hands of Saul to YHWH. Interestingly, YHWH answers the first only after it is repeated (with minor variations). For the sake of clarity in our analysis, I shall reproduce each reply following the appropriate question.

(Q.) *hāyasgīrūnī vaʕālē qəʕlīṣ vəyṣḏō?*

Will the citizens of Qeilah turn me over to him (lit., into his hand)?

(A.) *yasgīrū*

They will turn over.

(Q.) *hāyēreḏ šṣʕāl kaʔāšer šṣmaʕ ʕavdékṣ?*

Will Saul come down as your servant has heard?

(A.) *yēreḏ*

He will come down.

In both answers only the sentence-initial verb is reproduced from the question. The rest is deleted. The best known type of such a nearly totally deleted answer is that in which a subject pronoun is carried over from sentence-initial position and the remainder is deleted, left-to-right. An example is 1 Kgs. 13:14:

(Q.) *hāʔattīṣ ʕīš hṣʕēlōhīm ʕāšer bṣḏṣ mīhūḏṣ?*

Are you the man of God who has arrived from Judah?

(A.) *ʕṣnī*

I [am the man of God who has arrived from Judah].

Since the holy man had no rhetorical purpose in repeating the entire language of the question, he contented himself with the far less redundant, minimal answer, merely converting the second person pronoun of the question into the first person.<sup>28</sup>

As was alluded to above, if one adds to the surface structure of the question's sentence but retains the same sequence of constituents, one can delete the entire language of the question. The reply in this case indicates the affirmative by presupposing the full underlying sentence and then expanding it through the addition of a phrase or constituent. David asks Ziba: *hāʔattō šīvō*, "Are you Ziba?" Ziba replies: *ʿavdēxō*, "Your servant" (2 Sam. 9:2). This response of "yes" is a deleted form of the complete sentence, *ʔānī šīvō ʿavdēxō*, "I am Ziba, your servant." Such an analysis can be supported by versions of the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the Peshitta, which render "I am your servant," apparently for clarity.<sup>29</sup>

Since the convention for answering "yes" in BH assumes the unaltered surface sequence of constituents from the question, one can substitute, as in an example from English cited above, a different word from the one employed in the same syntactic slot in the question. An example may be found in 1 Kgs. 22:6 (cf. v. 15). Ahab said to the 400 prophets he was consulting:

*hāʿēlex ʿal rāmōθ gilʾōd lammilḥēmō ʔim ʿḥdōl*  
Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead in war, or shall I abstain?

The prophets replied, *ʿālē*, "Go up!" (idiomatically, "Attack!") rather than *léx*, "Go!"

A more substantial variation from the language of the question is contained in the following instance of affirmation. In 2 Sam. 9:3 David asks Ziba:

*hāʿēfes ʿōd ʔīs lāvēθ ššʾūl wəʿēʿšē ʿimmō ḥēšed ʔēlōhīm*  
Is there any other person (left) of Saul's house so that I might show him a Godly care?

Ziba in responding refers not to the house of Saul in general but more specifically to the appropriate branch of the Saulide dynasty, saying, *ʿōd bēn līhōnōθōn*, "There is another son of Jonathan's," and adding, *nəxe raylōyim*, "lame of feet." Ziba replaces the vague interrogative "any other person" with the name of the individual in question and then expands on this constituent with a phrase in apposition to it. The full underlying structure of the response is something like:

There is another [person, a] son of Jonathan's, lame of feet[, of Saul's house, that you might show him a Godly care].

So long as the surface sequence of constituents is preserved so that the corresponding deep structure is implied, the respondent to a yes-or-no question may combine deletion with addition. Consider an example from 1 Sam. 30:8. David asks YHWH:

*ʿerdof ʔahārē haggəḏūd hazzē? haʾássīgennū?*  
Shall I chase after that band? And will I overtake it?

<sup>28</sup> Cf., e.g., Gen. 27:24; Judg. 13:11. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures*, 20, refers to "ellipsis" here but does not elaborate.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. P. K. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel*, AB 9 (Garden City, NY, 1984), 259. It is unnecessary to reconstruct a fuller Hebrew *Vorlage*, as does M. Z. Segal, *The Books of Samuel* (Jerusalem, 1968), 292 [in Hebrew], who suggests reading *hinnē ʿavdēxō* as in v. 6 below.

YHWH's answer deletes the balance of the first question and expands upon the second:

*rəḏof kī haššey taššīy wəhaššel taššīl*

Chase, for you will overtake, yes, overtake, and you will rescue, yes, rescue.

The reader may have noticed that in the first part of this twofold question the interrogative particle, *ha*, is omitted. Although some have attributed such an omission to scribal error,<sup>30</sup> the numerous instances where the interrogative is indicated without a particle (Mitchell counts 39)<sup>31</sup> make such a conclusion unnecessary. Accordingly, the question *šlōm bōʿēxā*, "Do you come in peace?" (1 Sam. 16:4) without an interrogative particle is not essentially different from the formulation with particle, *hāšlōm bōʿēxā*, "Do you come in peace?" (1 Kgs. 2:13). Both receive the identical response in the affirmative, *šlōm*, "(In) peace," i.e., "yes" (1 Sam. 16:5; 1 Kgs. 2:13).<sup>32</sup> In those instances in which there is no interrogative particle the question is probably marked by speech intonation (which is unfortunately not recorded in BH).<sup>33</sup> The indication of an interrogative through speech intonation is established in Akkadian,<sup>34</sup> Classical Arabic,<sup>35</sup> and Ugaritic, where the first part of a double question (Heb. *ha . . . ʿim . . .*) is not indicated by any noticeable morph.<sup>36</sup> The same is true of Indoeuropean languages such as Portuguese and Rumanian.<sup>37</sup>

In view of this, the phenomenon of answering a yes-or-no question by deleting all but the first word(s) of the question reformulated as a reply may also be identified in responses not only to questions but to proposals. For example, when Joshua exhorts the Israelites to swear fealty to the Lord of Israel, he declares:

*ʿēḏīm ʿattēm bōxēm kī ʿattēm bəḥartēm lōxēm ʿēθ YHWH laʿāvōḏ ʿōḥō* (Josh. 24:22)

You are to be witnesses to yourselves that you have chosen YHWH, to worship him.

The people's response entails maximal left-to-right deletion: *ʿēḏīm*, "Witnesses," which is to say, "Witnesses [are we to ourselves that we have chosen YHWH, to worship

30 E.g., P. K. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel*, AB 8 (Garden City, NY, 1980), 431; cf. S. R. Driver, *Notes on . . . Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1913), 222; Segal, *The Books of Samuel*, 222. Both Driver and Segal compare other passages where interrogative *h* is omitted and allow that the omission here may result from a choice of style rather than a paleographic slip.

31 H. G. Mitchell, "The Omission of the Interrogative Particle," in R. F. Harper et al., eds., *Old Testament and Semitic Studies in Memory of William Rainey Harper* (Chicago, 1908), 1:115–29. Mitchell attempts to explain as many omissions as he can as scribal error but allows for 22 "genuine cases."

32 S. Olyan, "Hāšālōm: Some Literary Considerations of 2 Kings 9," *CBQ* 46 (1984), 652–68, has important insight into what *šlōm* means in such contexts. At 664, n. 43, he emends the interrogative use of *šlōm*, "Is it well?" in 2 Kgs. 9:19 by supplying the *h*-particle on the basis of the formulations of the questions elsewhere in the chapter (cf. vv. 11, 18, 22). Such an emendation makes the one case conform to the others but is grammatically unnecessary.

33 Cf., e.g., GKC §150a.

34 Cf. von Soden, *GAG* §153d.

35 Cf. W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, 1971), §165.

36 Cf., e.g., M. Held, "Rhetorical Questions in Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew," *Eretz Israel* 9 (1969), 71–79, at 72a.

37 Cf., e.g., S. Parkinson, "Portuguese," in *The World's Major Languages* (see n. 12 above), 273; G. Mallinson, "Rumanian," in *ibid.*, 315.

him]." The same phenomenon, also using *ʿēdīm*, "Witnesses," is attested in somewhat more elaborate form in Ruth 4:9–11 (cf. also 1 Sam. 12:5).<sup>38</sup>

Our analysis of deletion may also be applied to other types of questions in BH, as they are in, say, English (see above). In such cases the sentence-initial syntactic slot occupied by the question-word is filled in the reply by the word or phrase that answers the question. In the examples that follow deleted constituents will be enclosed in brackets:

- (Q.) *mā tavaqqeš*, What do you seek? (Gen. 37:15)  
 (A.) *ʔeθ ʔahay ʔnōxī mavaqqeš*, My brothers do I seek (v. 16).

- (Q.) *mī ʕšš ʔeθ haddvṽr hazzē* (Judg. 6:29)  
 Who did this thing?  
 (A.) *giḏʕōn ben yōʕšš ʕšš ʔeθ haddvṽr hazzē* (loc. cit.)  
 Gideon son of Joash did this thing.

- (Q.) *lām ʕālīθem ʕlēnū* (Judg. 15:10)  
 Why have you come upon us?  
 (A.) *leʔēsōr ʔeθ šimšōn ʕlīnū* (loc. cit.)  
 To bind Samson have we come [upon you].

- (Q.) *lām ʕθay ʔaʕtīr ləxṽ* (Exod. 8:5)  
 When shall I intercede for you?  
 (A.) *lām ʕḥṽr* (v. 6)  
 Tomorrow [shall you intercede for me].

In the first two examples the answer repeats the full language of the question; in the third there is some deletion; and in the last the deletion is maximal, left-to-right, as the prepositional or adverbial phrase "tomorrow" replaces the question-word and the balance of the sentence is, in Hankamer's terminology, stripped.<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that, in contrast to the illustrations from Akkadian cited above, deletion in answers to questions in BH is typically rightward, not leftward.

Analysis of deletion in yes-or-no questions should therefore be regarded as only a special case of deletion in answers to questions and, in general, of syntactic deletion within BH and Northwest Semitic. As the phenomenon is better understood more broadly, one will be on safer ground in drawing further conclusions from the case at hand.<sup>40</sup>

38 Cf., e.g., E. F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth, AB 7* (Garden City, NY, 1975), 152.

39 Hankamer, *Deletion* (see n. 20 above), 393–400.

40 For syntactic deletion in BH, see, e.g., D. Yellin, *סכבים נבחרים*, "לחורר המליצה התנכית," ["On Biblical Rhetoric," *Selected Writings*] (Jerusalem, 1939), 2:67–85; E. L. Greenstein, "Two Variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and Their Psycholinguistic Background," *JANES* 6 (1974), esp. 87–96; idem, "The Snaring of the Sea in the Baal Epic," *Maarav* 3 (1982), esp. 210–15; idem, "How Does Parallelism Mean?" *A Sense of Text = JQR* Supp. (1983), esp. 46–52 and passim; M. Z. Kaddari, *Studies in Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Ramat Gan, Israel, 1976), esp. 34–44 [in Hebrew]; M. Rottenberg, *Unknown Syntax Rules of the Bible Language* (Tel Aviv, 1979), esp. 41–95 [in Hebrew], with the critical comments of S. Kogut in *Leshonenu* 44 (1979), 12–23, 109–23 [in Hebrew]; M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN, 1980), esp. 118–29; and, on deletion of the negative particle, R. Weiss, in *Shnaton* 2 (1977), 82–92; I. Haggay, in *Beth Mikra* 32 (1987), 162–67 [both in Hebrew].