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**The Noun יִשָּׁה (‘îš) in Biblical Hebrew: A Term of Affiliation**
THE NOUN ישן (‘ıš) IN BIBLICAL HEBREW: A TERM OF AFFILIATION

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“The last place to look for the meaning of a word is in the dictionary.”

—Harold P. Scanlin¹

One of the most frequent nouns in the Hebrew Bible is ישן (and its functional plural, ישנים), appearing well over two thousand times.² Lexicons and grammars generally gloss it as “man” (adult male). However, my own semantic analysis suggests that ישן functions very differently in biblical Hebrew than the conventional view allows. Most often, it seems to be a term of affiliation; that is, the noun denotes relationship either to a group or to another party. Only occasionally and incidentally does ישן connote an “adult male.”

My analysis treats in a more cursory way the feminine counterpart term ישנה, which appears in the Bible some 781 times, roughly one-third as often

² This article, which I dedicate to the memory of my gracious mother-in-law, Nicole Uffer (d. 3 Feb. 2008), is based on my presentation to the Biblical Lexicography section of the Society of Biblical Literature on Nov. 19, 2007. I thank Prof. Carol Meyers (Duke Univ.) for patiently critiquing several iterations of my understanding of ישן during our work on The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), for which I served as the revising editor. I am grateful also to Dr. Reinier de Blois (Editor, Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew) for his tutelage, as well as to Rabbis Ivan Caine and Vivie Mayer (Reconstructionist Rabbinical College), Dr. Laurence Kutler, and Professors Adele Berlin (Univ. of Maryland), Alan Crown (Univ. of Sydney, emeritus), Edward Greenstein (Bar-Ilan Univ.), Stephen Kaufman (Hebrew Union College/Cincinnati), Samuel Meier (Ohio State Univ.), Bruce Waltke (Reformed Theological Seminary), and Ziony Zevit (American Jewish Univ.) for their thoughtful responses to my queries on the semantics of ישן. I also thank the anonymous reviewers.
as נ. It evaluates the semantic correspondences between the two terms mainly for what they say regarding נ.

**Prior Scholarship on נ as a Term of Affiliation**

More than thirty years ago, the late Alison Grant examined 2174 instances of נ in the Bible. She classified each instance according to the nature of its reference—most basically, whether it was particular or general. Latent in her article are the distributions shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Reference</th>
<th>Frequency of usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any or each member of a defined group or class</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular individual (definite or indefinite)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone (undefined group)</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General human reference</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grant found that at most 20% of all instances of the noun נ point to a particular individual (with either definite or indefinite reference). In nearly 3 out of 4 cases, נ denotes any or each member of a defined group or category of persons. The distribution is so lopsided that one can hardly gainsay that most biblical instances of this word situate the referent in relation to a group.

Grant drew the following conclusion:

'ish . . . relates primarily to an individual as a member of a particular group. . . . [An] 'ish . . . would not be thought of as an individual with an independent existence, . . . but always in relation to [a] particular group or community. (pp. 9–10)

In other words, נ appears to be a term of affiliation.

Yet Grant's insight into the nature of נ hardly figures into recent lexicography, as can be seen by checking six standard lexical reference works published since her article appeared. The first meaning (implicitly or explicitly the primary meaning) listed in those works is as follows:

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3 Alison M. Grant, “‘Adam and Ish: Man in the OT,” *Australian Biblical Review* 25 (1977), pp. 2–11. Grant checked all instances that she could locate. According to TLOT (below, n. 10), the common noun נ occurs 2183 times in the Bible; per DCH (below, n. 8), 2179 times; per Accordance 7.4 (Bible software), 2187. The discrepancy of 1% does not affect Grant’s overall results or principal conclusions.

4 Grant’s report did not present a complete tabulation of how she categorized every instance of the words under study. Arguably the reader or the present author might well prefer to classify some instances of נ differently. However, because most instances of נ are uncontroversial, chances are that any such reclassification would not appreciably affect the basic result.
• “Connotes primarily the concept of man as an individual.”

• “Biologically male nature.”

• “Man in a general sense, with further specification via opposition.”

• “Usually man, person, often without contextual emphasis on gender.”

• “The basic meaning of 'ʾîš is man, and it is the opposite of 'ʾîššâ, woman.”

• “The word’s basic meaning is ‘man’ (the mature male in contrast to the woman).”

Even such a brief glance is sufficient to show that the lexicographers have not perceived שֶׂ֤ר to be an intrinsically relational term. Although some lexicons do indicate that שֶׂ֤ר occasionally bears the sense of someone who stands in relationship to a group or party (e.g., “retainers,” “governor,” “escorts”), the cases that they then cite tend to signal affiliation syntactically—via a possessive suffix or a genitive construction—rather than stating that שֶׂ֤ר alone may bear this meaning.

However, Grant's finding warrants a second look because of other, nonlinguistic scholarship during the past three decades. Various scholars have applied social science methodologies to reconstruct the society of ancient Israel and its neighbors. They have consistently concluded that ancient Near Eastern societies were group-oriented rather than individual-oriented, and personal identity was viewed in relational terms.

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5 Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (1980), edited by R. Laird Harris; entry 83a on שֶׂ֤ר by Thomas E. McComiskey.


7 “Hombre. En sentido genérico, que se puede especificar por polarización, es decir, contrapuesto a otro” (my transl.), Diccionario Bíblico Hebreo-Español [= DBHE] (1993), edited by Luis Alonso-Schökel.


9 New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (1997), edited by Willem A. VanGemeren; entry #408 by Victor P. Hamilton, pp. 388–90. This entry cites Alison Grant's article yet does not engage her conclusions.


12 Those scholars' statements, listed in chronological order, include the
a conceptual group orientation does not necessarily determine the meaning of any particular word in that culture’s language. Even so, it does commend to us a procedural preference: when we have a choice between two plausible ways to construe יִשָּׁהַ, the one that warrants consideration first is the one closest to ancient Near Eastern realities and concepts.

In this article, therefore, I investigate the validity of Grant’s conclusion regarding the semantics of יִשָּׁהַ, using the tools of modern linguistics. Specifically, I examine whether יִשָּׁהַ, in its primary (that is, most frequently attested) sense, intrinsically denotes relationship or affiliation.

PARADIGMATIC (COMPARATIVE) ANALYSIS

יִשָּׁהַ versus דֶּשֶׁה

Grant’s article mainly contrasts the usage of the noun דֶּשֶׁה with that of יִשָּׁהַ, because both words were usually considered similar enough to lie in the same semantic domain. In conducting that paradigmatic analysis, Grant’s interest was to clarify the meaning of דֶּשֶׁה in Genesis 1–3; she paid attention to יִשָּׁהַ because it might shed light on דֶּשֶׁה. Thus she tallied the referents of all of the Bible’s instances of דֶּשֶׁה in the same way as she did for יִשָּׁהַ. After her initial tally, Grant hypothesized that a biblical author would employ the word יִשָּׁהַ when thinking of either a particular individual or group of individuals, or any member of a particular group; whereas the text uses the word דֶּשֶׁה to refer either to humankind, human beings in general, or any human being. She then conducted a second tally. She found that out of some 2700 instances, at most a dozen could possibly be said not to fit the hypothesis.

following:

“In the ancient world, . . . individuals were first and foremost members of a group.”

“The primary means of maintaining [social] order [was the] opposition between [competing] groups—families, clans, . . . lineages, and tribes.”

“In kinship-based communities [like ancient Israel], persons . . . interact with one another . . . to a large extent on the basis of blood descent.”

“A person was not an autonomous entity but someone’s father, mother, daughter, son, grandparent, and so forth. These terms designated behavior as much as biology.”

“The ‘household’ . . . provides the template for social interaction at all levels. . . . Subordinates are either ‘sons’ or ‘servants’ of the person in authority, [and] superiors are ‘fathers’ or ‘masters.’”
Grant concluded that the two words are employed so differently that the burden of proof would seem to be on those who think that these two words belong in the same semantic domain. The essential semantic distinctions are dramatic and robust. As we have seen, ישן usually situates its referent as “a member of a group or category,” whereas less than 2% of the instances of יָשָׁן (that is, 13 cases) could possibly be said to refer to someone as part of a group. And whereas 20% of instances of ישן refer to a particular individual, no instances of יָשָׁן do so, apart from one special case: the mythical progenitor of the human species. Grant concluded—correctly, in my view—that the terms ישן and יָשָׁן cannot be considered synonyms.

The following chart graphically illustrates Grant’s spotlight on the semantic contrast of the two words.

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13 Grant cited also Josh. 14:15 as referring to a particular individual, but more precisely it is a class reference to a progenitor.

14 She wrote: “The two words may be sharply distinguished in meaning . . . almost without exception throughout the whole of the Hebrew OT” (p. 2). In certain situations ישן and יָשָׁן at first glance do seem interchangeable; the Bible sometimes uses them as a stock word pair (e.g., II Kings 7:10; Isa. 2:9; Jer. 2:6). This apparent synonymity can be explained simply: in such cases, the group of which an ישן is the member is the entire human race. The two terms (ישן and יָשָׁן) are then functionally synonymous within that very limited context, even though they approach their referent from different angles. Laurence Kutler, who correctly stresses the biblical use of ישן as a military term whereas יָשָׁן is not, unfortunately overlooks Grant’s work, whose results undermine his assertion that "'ish and 'adam are close but not identical synonyms. . . . Each verse must be scrutinized on its own merit" (“A Structural Semantic Approach to Israelite Communal Terminology,” JANES 14 [1982], pp. 69–77; 73–74).
THE NOUN אֵש (ʼîš) IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

Now let us compare אֵש to another noun, בָּן, which is unquestionably a term of affiliation. Someone who is a בָּן is not a lone individual, but rather is a בָּן of somebody or something else. Thus, if אֵש is indeed a relational term, its nature should become clearer through our comparison.

As it happens, בָּן is one of the Bible’s most frequently occurring words, appearing nearly five thousand times—more than twice as often as אֵש. Fortunately, for the purposes of this article a schematic comparison between אֵש and בָּן will prove to be sufficiently conclusive.

The two nouns seem similar to each other—and unlike בָּן—in the following six ways:

1. Both אֵש and בָּן can point to a specific party, which enables delineation of relationship.

   אֵש (Job 1:1)
   בָּן (I Sam. 22:20)

2. Both of our nouns can ascribe membership in a genus (that is, affiliation with a group) even to non-human entities.

   בָּן (Gen. 7:2)
   אֵש (Num 6:10)

3. Both can express relationship with a person, as is made clear by a possessive suffix:

   אֵש (Gen. 16:3)
   בָּן (Gen. 21:10)

4. Both can refer to a human being in terms of membership in a category. Here, for example, are instances where the two nouns are treated as roughly parallel in function:

   אֵש (I Sam. 20:31) and בָּן (I Kings 2:26); אֵש (Judg. 6:8) and בָּן (I Kings 2:9). Likewise, a chief servant is called בָּן הבּוּד (Gen. 15:3, Eccles. 2:7) or

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15 The first example introduces the character Job; the second focuses on a priest’s sole surviving son. Similarly, both אֵש and בָּן form plurals and are countable entities: אֵש (Judg. 8:30); בָּן (Jer. 52:25). In contrast, בָּן is never plural in the biblical corpus and is not countable (cf. Num. 31:46).

16 In the first example, God instructs Noah to take representative animals; the second example refers to birds fit for use in a priestly ritual.

17 “Her son” and “her husband,” respectively. In contrast, in the biblical corpus אֵש never takes a possessive suffix.

18 The first example describes Saul’s search for qualified warriors; the second describes the character of those who gathered around a treasonous outlaw. Other examples that indicate membership in a category: בָּן (I Sam. 20:31) and בָּן (I Kings 2:26); אֵש (I Sam. 14:52) and אֵש (Judg. 3:29); אֵש (Amos 7:14) and אֵש (Judg. 6:8); and אֵש (Isa. 19:11) and אֵש (I Kings 2:9). Likewise, a chief servant is called ben bāyit (Gen. 15:3, Eccles. 2:7) or
5. Both can refer to a constituent of a group that is signified by a collective term:

(I Sam. 14:52)  וַיַּפְלַג מַרְכָּז בְּבֵית הַהוֹוָא מֶשֶׁלֶת אֲלֵפָּא (Exod. 32:28)  לֹא יִשְׁמַע אֲשֶׁר לְאַרְבָּא שֵׁם בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה

(II Chron. 13:7)  יִסָּלֵב עַל־יָד אֶת־שָׁהֵם בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Jer 49:18)  אֲשֶׁר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

6. Both can refer to a group that is expressed in construct terms—that is, where the group is identified as comprised of its individual members:

(I Sam. 9:2)  אֲשֶׁר מַכְּבִּין יִשְׂרָאֵל (Josh 10:24)  בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה

(Exod. 34:32)  בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Gen. 43:19)  כֵּלֶב בָּרָאָה

From these six similarities I provisionally conclude that אֲשֶׁר functions like the relational term בַּ. That is, both nouns relate individual members to a group, and vice-versa. And their focus on relationship transcends even the boundary of humankind, to include other entities. Thus it seems to me that these two words may be said to lie in the same semantic domain of “relational” terms.

As for contrasts in the usage of the two nouns, I will mention one that seems instructive. When a group is identified via a plural construct term such as בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה, one might then expect that its constituent members are identified via the singular בַּ, but that is often not the case. Rather, the constituent member of a בַּ-defined group is an אֲשֶׁר:

(I Sam. 30:11)  בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Ezek. 16:26)  אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה

Both Speiser and Kutler assert meanwhile that אֲשֶׁר is the individual correlate of the collective term בַּ; the only evidence offered, however, is the expression אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Prov. 16:27) and to בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (I Sam. 25:17).

The first example counts the dead after a police operation, treating אֲשֶׁר as the individual correlate of בַּ—a pairing that E. A. Speiser already noted (“People” and ‘Nation’ of Israel,” JBL 79 [1960]: 160) and Kutler affirmed (“A Structural Semantic Approach,” 77; above, n. 14); in the second example, for the collective בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה, the individual correlate is אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה, a term that occurs more than ninety times. Both Speiser and Kutler assert meanwhile that אֲשֶׁר is the individual correlate of the collective term בַּ; the only evidence offered, however, is the expression אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Job 34:29), yet this example is inconclusive, because there can also be read as a general term for “humankind,” like the parallelism of אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה and אֶלֶּה הַכָּל בָּרָאָה in Job 34:15, or between אֶלֶּה בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה and אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה in Jer. 49:15 and Ps. 94:10.

Nor does the presence of בַּ necessarily imply a subsidiary ordering of terms; cf. Deut. 12:22; II Sam. 14:16; Jer. 48:7; Ps. 49:3.

hā-'îš ‘āser ‘al hā-bāyît (Gen. 43:19) or hā-'îš (43:17). Both terms also indicate national membership: אֶלֶּה הַכָּל בָּרָאָה (I Sam. 30:11) and אֶלֶּה בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Ezek. 16:26). In contrast, only once in the biblical corpus does the word אֲשֶׁר arguably form a construct relation of any kind: אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Prov. 6:12), the first two words of which can be likened to אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Prov. 16:27) and to אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (I Sam. 25:17).

The first example counts the dead after a police operation, treating אֲשֶׁר as the individual correlate of אֶלֶּה—a pairing that E. A. Speiser already noted (“People” and ‘Nation’ of Israel,” JBL 79 [1960]: 160) and Kutler affirmed (“A Structural Semantic Approach,” 77; above, n. 14); in the second example, for the collective אֶלֶּה בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה, the individual correlate is אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה, a term that occurs more than ninety times. Both Speiser and Kutler assert meanwhile that אֲשֶׁר is the individual correlate of the collective term אֶלֶּה; the only evidence offered, however, is the expression אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה (Job 34:29), yet this example is inconclusive, because there can also be read as a general term for “humankind,” like the parallelism of אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה and אֶלֶּה הַכָּל בָּרָאָה in Job 34:15, or between אֶלֶּה בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה and אֲשֶׁר בַּכָּל בָּרָאָה in Jer. 49:15 and Ps. 94:10.

Nor does the presence of אֲשֶׁר necessarily imply a subsidiary ordering of terms; cf. Deut. 12:22; II Sam. 14:16; Jer. 48:7; Ps. 49:3.
rather than, say, בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל or simply בּן מְבָנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל. As will be demonstrated below, the usage rule in biblical Hebrew seems to be: whenever a member is typifying or representing such a group, this is conveyed via שֵׁם, not via בּ.

**Lexical and Contextual Meanings**

My analysis of hundreds of instances suggests that the primary (most common) sense of the noun שֵׁם refers to types of affiliations and relationships that together in English can be designated only by several overlapping terms. Today one cannot be sure whether the native Hebrew speaker considered these situationally defined types to be distinct senses of the word שֵׁם. (Hebrew did not force the speaker to make a distinction.) At any rate, the remainder of this article will treat what in English are three semantic nuances of שֵׁם: participant member, representative member, and representative. All three nuances involve relationship (with another party) or affiliation (with a group). In Hebrew these three nuances may have been considered a single lexical semantic domain.

Let me now introduce what I, as a contextually oriented translator, have perceived as distinct English equivalents for the biblical Hebrew usage of שֵׁם, within each of the three aforementioned nuances. A later section will give examples.

**Participant Member**

An שֵׁם can simply be a member of the group in question, as Grant mentioned. Likewise, שֵׁם seems to be the appropriate word choice for situations where a person is a participant—such as a party to a marriage, a legal proceeding, a transaction, a contract, or a conflict.

**Representative Member**

Another nuance of שֵׁם is to refer to a typical or characteristic exemplar of the group in question. In this sense, any single member “represents” the other members of the group because they are interchangeable for purposes of the discussion. In English translation, these usages are rendered variously as: one, each (one), anyone, or someone.

**Representative on Behalf of Others**

The third related nuance is “representational”—that is, an שֵׁם possesses the authority to stand for the group, or to act on behalf of the group, or to act on behalf of another party. In English terms, these meanings include:

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ruler, leader, notable, or householder; representative, delegate, or commissioner; agent, emissary, or envoy; deputy or subordinate; scion or heir.

**PROCEDURAL NOTES**

The next section will examine characteristic examples from each of the above three nuances of lexical meaning, in order to further demonstrate my contention that פֶּן is intrinsically a relational or affiliational term—at least in most of its biblical attestations. But first, two procedural notes.

**Spotting Both of the Noun’s Referents**

A relational term has, in effect, not one referent but two: a direct referent and an indirect one. In the case of our noun פֶּן, it points directly to the individual (member or party or representative), while indirectly it refers to the group or situation or party with which that פֶּן is affiliated. And our noun functions so as to relate those two referents to each other.

Depicted schematically, the meaning of our word has three aspects:

![Diagram of relational terms]

To understand how פֶּן is functioning in a given instance, the listener or reader must discern both referents. In many cases, however, the indirect referent is not stated outright; it must be inferred from the situation.21

**Avoiding Syntactic Markers of Affiliation**

In biblical Hebrew, one can easily convey a sense of affiliation between a given noun and something else via syntactic markers—either a construct relationship (such as בְּנִין פֶּן) or a possessive pronominal suffix (such as בְּנִין אֲדֹנָיו). In order to clarify whether פֶּן functions as a term of affiliation on its own, the following analysis focuses on instances where the Bible employs פֶּן or בְּנִין as absolute nouns.22

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21 For more on how to identify the indirect referent of פֶּן, see further below, especially the Discussion.

22 As identified via Accordance 7.4, of the Bible’s 2187 instances of our noun, 73% are in absolute form (1331 singular, 273 plural).
SYNTAGMATIC (CONTEXTUAL) ANALYSIS

Collocated Verbs
Evidence in support of viewing ישן as a term of affiliation comes from looking at the collocated verbs. With regard to the proposed nuance of ישן as “participant member (of a group),” one would expect to find ישן correlated with verbs that presume group membership. That is, only those individuals who are members of the group in question would be involved in the action described by the verb. For example, consider the verb קבץ (“gathered”),

... ותָּקְבִּץֻּוֹתָאָלָלוֹאָרָיָא (I Sam 22:2)

The following groups appear in the Bible as direct objects of this verb:

פָּלְשָׁתִים • מְאֹרֶים • יַרְדֹּנֶה • יֶשֶׂרְאֵל • בָּלָהַמ

And in context, the constituents of these groups are designated by the following terms:

יאֲשָׁה • אָדוֹן • חַבְּרָה • בֹּדָא • בְּעֵל

The first five words on this list are relational terms. By virtue of being on such a list, the implication is that the last word, ישן, is a relational term as well.23

The indirect referent of ישן is thus defined by the verb; that is, the group in question consists of those who are gathered.

Correlated Group Nouns
Another line of evidence to suggest that ישן can denote a “participant member” is its correlation with collective group nouns. For example:24

הָאָשֶׁר בְּבֵית אָשֶׁר נָסַבְתָּה מִלְחַחַת אָשֶׁר יִרְכָּמָה (Judg 18:22)

יִנְהָלֶשׁ אוֹלִיִּיָּתָה אָשֶׁר יַרְכָּמָה (Judg. 11:3)

That is, the individual correlate of מִלְחַחַת (“community”) and of הָאָשֶׁר (“army”) is ישן. Similarly, as we saw earlier, ישן is also the individual correlate of בָּלָהַמ

23 The indirect referent of ישן is thus defined by the verb; that is, the group in question consists of those who are gathered.

24 In the first example, Moses and Aaron speak while trying to calm God down during Korah’s rebellion. The Contemporary Torah (above, n. 2) thus reads: “When one member sins, will you be wrathful with the whole community?” The second example is describing the success of Aram’s army against that of Judah.
(“people, fighting force”). Thus, it seems to me that the recurring idiom כבש יד (literally, “like one ʧ”) makes sense quite directly if understood to mean “like a group that has only one member.”

(Judg. 20:8)

With the Preposition of Membership
A further line of evidence for a “membership” sense of איש is the frequency and variety of similar constructions in which איש, in context, can only mean “one member out of the specified group.” The preposition יָּדוּ is a key part of this construction, as these examples show:

(Exod. 2:1)
(Lev. 17:3)
(II Sam. 20:11)

Narrative Presumption of Membership
Occasionally, the construction of a narrative seems to presume that איש has a “membership” sense. Consider the case of the איש who is gathering wood on the sabbath day:

(Num. 15:32)

The perpetrator, who is identified only as an איש, is soon stoned to death in punishment for the deed. Now, the relevant laws about observing the Sabbath apply only to Israelites (Exod. 35:1–3). So how is it that the readers are supposed to realize that this fellow is an Israelite? The way that this passage makes the best narrative sense is to presume that the audience should know that איש means “a member of the group just mentioned.”

Partner in Marriage
The universally recognized nuance of איש as “husband,” which occurs in more than seventy biblical instances, can be seen as an expression of our noun’s “participant member” sense. That is, the noun איש serves to denote (the male) partner or party to the marriage, which is our noun’s

25 To convey the relational nuance of איש in translation, I have construed the verb impersonally and rendered the clause יָּדוּ איש כבש פָּנָיו as: “one of their fellows was found gathering wood” (The Torah: A Women’s Commentary (NY: URJ Press, 2008).

26 The King James Version (KJV) renders איש as “husband” 77 times. All 12 lexicons cited above list “husband” as a meaning of איש. However, only a few of them (HALOT, TDOT, DBHE; above, nn. 8 and 11) recognize this sense—albeit rarely—even in the absence of a possessive pronoun (e.g., “her איש”).
implied indirect referent. Examples of יִשָּׁה in the context of marriage, often counterposed with יִשָּׁה, include the following.27

In such situations, the sense of “husband” is easily explained by viewing our noun as an intrinsically relational term. Meanwhile, the feminine counterpart term יִשָּׁה likewise is understood to mean “wife” in similar contexts. Such correspondence in usage corroborates the proposed “(male) party to a marriage” interpretation of יִשָּׁה.28

**Party to a Proceeding**

The noun יִשָּׁה is sometimes used conspicuously in the context of a legal proceeding, dispute, or violent conflict.29 Examples include the prescription of legal procedures:30

27 The first example ends the passage about a ritual for a husband who accuses his wife of adultery; the second example conditions a woman’s freedom to make vows on whether she has a husband; and the third example encourages matchmaking.

28 The correspondence in usage also explains why the feminine term is used even for slave-wives and concubines (Gen. 16:3; 25:1 [in light of v. 6]; 30:4; Judg. 19:1). Further, it undercuts a statement by Carol Meyers in *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary* (above, n. 25), which infers from a lexical fact—that יִשָּׁה means both “woman” and “wife”—that “a woman’s identity was virtually inseparable from her status as a married woman” (p. xii). Rather, the primary sense of יִשָּׁה appears to be “(female) affiliate,” for which the most salient English rendering in marriage-related contexts is “wife.” Thus, what the word יִשָּׁה says about “a woman’s identity” is only that the Bible almost always expresses that concept in relational terms—just as it does for a man’s identity.

29 “Conspicuous” usage means that the noun could be either omitted or replaced with a pronoun and the passage would still make grammatical sense.

30 The first example discusses how a party is to be compensated for having been wronged; the second example discusses the disposition of a legal dispute.
The same conspicuous usage of אָישׁ is found in direct speech:

31

(1 Sam. 17:26)
(II Sam. 12:5)
(I Kgs. 21:10)

Similar to such instances are those that designate both parties as אָישׁ:

32

(Ezek. 18:8)
(Isa. 3:5)
(I Kgs. 20:20)

Both types of usage are easily explained by viewing our noun as an intrinsically relational term, whose indirect referent is the set of interested parties to the proceeding in question, while the direct referent is one of the parties. Meanwhile, the feminine counterpart term אַשה likewise is used conspicuously to mean a “party” in similar contexts. Such correspondence in usage corroborates the proposed interpretation of אָישׁ.

As Characteristic of a Group of Human Beings

Let us move to the second basic nuance of אָיש, namely, where it denotes a typical or characteristic exemplar—what I call a “representative member.” By all accounts, one frequently attested meaning of אָיש is “each one” in a group. Consider this example from the episode in which Abram and his nephew Lot part company:

(1 Sam. 17:26)
(II Sam. 12:5)
(I Kgs. 21:10)

If אָיש is intrinsically about affiliation, then this usage is easy to explain. As stated earlier, אָיש functions so as to relate a direct referent to an indirect one. It points (indirectly) to the group and (more directly) to its individual members. Here—as defined by the plural verb—the “group in question” consists of those kin who are now separating from each other. The individual members of that group, as they part ways, are momentarily

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31 The first example is young David’s question regarding the reward for whoever challenges Goliath, who has twice demanded an אָיש with whom he can fight (vv. 8, 10); the second example is King David’s condemnation of the guilty party in Nathan’s parable; and the third example is Queen Jezebel’s secret instructions to arrange for false witnesses so as to condemn Naboth.

32 The first example states that doing justice is part of the characterization of a righteous person; the second example, that divine punishment of the Judahites will involve mutual oppression; and the third example describes the progress of a battle. Compare the construct expressions אָישׁ כְּרָבָם (“disputant”) in Judg. 12:2, Isa. 41:1, Jer. 15:10, and Job 31:35; and אָישׁ כְּלָמָה (“party to war”) in II Sam. 8:10 (= 1 Chron. 18:10), Isa. 42:12, and I Chron. 28:3. See also I Sam. 2:25.

33 E.g., Exod. 2:7; Deut. 22:14; I Kings 3:16; Ezek. 23:2.
interchangeable with regard to the action described. It is in this sense that each one is an שִׁישׁ. 34

Corroboration of this understanding of שִׁישׁ comes from the corresponding usage of אָנָה in distributive or reciprocal references within a specifically female group. 35

As Characteristic of a Group with Non-Human Members

On some two dozen occasions, שִׁישׁ means “each one” in a group that is defined by the verb—as discussed above—yet that group comprises direct referents that are not individual human beings. For example:

כִּי־אִישׁ בָּהֵן הוֹדֵלָה מַעֲשֹׁת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Num. 36:9)

Here our noun שִׁישׁ relates a group (“those who shall remain attached” to their landholding) to its members, but the group’s members are not individuals. Rather, each member is one of “the tribes” of the Israelites. Biblical Hebrew similarly applies שִׁישׁ to the elements of many other abstract sets: households (Exod. 12:4; Num. 1:52, 2:2, 2:34); Israelite clans or lineages (Num. 26:54, 35:8); nations (Gen. 10:5b; Zeph. 2:11); foreign deities (II Kings 18:33; Isa. 36:18); and spiritual creatures with wings and multiple faces (Ezek. 1:9, 11, 12, 23).

Our noun also designates various concrete inanimate objects: split halves of animal carcasses (Gen. 15:10); Leviathan’s scales (Job 41:9); engraved stones on the high priest’s breastplate (Exod. 28:21); brackets for bronze lavers (I Kings 7:30); images of cherubim (Exod. 25:20, 37:9); and stars in the sky (Isa. 40:26). 36

This remarkably wide range of application makes perfect sense if שִׁישׁ is indeed a term of affiliation. It then functions in all such cases according to its primary sense as “representative member”: whenever one has in view a group or set that is comprised of interchangeable members, שִׁישׁ is the word that enables a Hebrew speaker to refer to each of them.

As Alison Grant noted, the scope of such entities cited above “suggests that the word שִׁישׁ itself carries the meaning ‘each one (of a group)’ rather than meaning ‘man.’” (p. 9). This is a strong argument in favor of construing שִׁישׁ as a relational term. 37

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34 Alternatively, rather than describing the situation in English in terms of member-and-group, one could characterize Abram and Lot as parties to the proceeding, that is, to the action being described. See the previous sub-section.

35 Exod. 3:22; Jer. 9:19; Ruth 1:8.

36 Inexplicably, Robert Alter states in his commentary (The Five Books of Moses: A Translation and Commentary [NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004]) that שִׁישׁ “is a word applied to animate beings, not to things,” an assertion already disproved circa 1160 by Abraham Ibn Ezra, ad loc.

37 The sense of “each” is conventionally explained as a case of semantic extension, whereby שִׁישׁ was initially used to mean “a man,” and then “each man,” and later “each human,” and eventually “each member” of some non-human set. While such development is possible, it would have required greater conceptual
comes from the fact that the feminine equivalent נשים is used in a corresponding manner.\textsuperscript{38}

**Representing a Group as Its Authority**

As stated above, a third nuance of שמן is as a “representative”—one who is authorized to stand for the group (or another party), or to act on their (or its) behalf. Grant does not mention this sense as intrinsic to שמן, nor do the lexicons cited above. Yet even without proceeding systematically, I have found that more than 10% of the instances of שמן employ it in a grammatically absolute and syntactically conspicuous manner in this sense.\textsuperscript{39} Representational function is thus a significant part of the semantic range of this noun.

When Genesis describes the growth of Jacob’s wealth, the usage of שמן is anomalous enough (per the conventional view) that the critical scholar Claus Westermann opined that “there is no reason for the designation.”\textsuperscript{40}

In this passage, the direct referent of שמן is evidently the previous verse’s last noun, which is נשים. But the usage is conspicuous: if in our verse the stated subject נשים were left out, its two verbs (with their masculine inflections) would still unquestionably refer back to Jacob. The wording prompts the text’s audience to construe שמן in some meaningful sense—which would not be “adult male,” because Jacob’s social gender is neither in question nor particularly germane.

Looking to the narrative context, we see that Jacob has expressed a concern that drives this whole passage: “It is high time that I do something for my own household (בית) (v. 30, transl. Speiser). That is, Jacob was a householder responsible for four wives and many children, yet he lacked an independent means of supporting them. Now, however, we are told that his wealth increases (literally “bursts”)—and it is Jacob who becomes the trustee of all the assets detailed. The context thus suggests that the sense of שמן here has to do with his position as representing the entire corporate

\textsuperscript{38} E.g., Exod. 26:3 (cloths); Isa. 34:15 (buzzards); Ezek. 1:9 (wings); Zech. 11:9 (sheep).


household. The term conveys his relationship to that household (v. 30), which is the indirect referent of יש in our verse.

In short, the text’s composer(s) apparently presumed that its original audience would grasp that יש here means something like the English term “family patriarch.”

Selecting a Certain Number of Representatives from a Group
A second example from the book of Genesis further illustrates the sense of יש as a duly authorized “representative.” The narrator relates that after Joseph’s father Jacob and his extended family arrive in Egypt, Joseph the vizier prepares them for an audience with the king:

This usage of יש is conspicuous; the initial clause could easily have omitted the term, saying יש מתroulette שהוהיה אתו בָּאשׁוּב (Gen. 47:2). In other words, the text has gone out of its way here to employ יש, giving the word extra significance: those who are chosen are not merely iOS (“brothers”)—they are more specifically יש. The co-text further strengthens the importance here of יש: as the late E. A. Speiser pointed out, the word אתו serves to emphasize Joseph’s selectivity. And in the context of a larger pool of available candidates, the verb הָלַךְ יָדִיעָה connotes an act of conscious selection. Taken together, the verse’s wording prompts the audience to read יש meaningfully—and not as “adult males,” for that fact is both known and irrelevant.

The narrative context conveys that Joseph is designating some of his brothers to represent them all. Such a sense for יש fits the verse’s syntax perfectly, in contrast to any other recognized sense, yielding: “Having from among his brothers selected five representatives, . . .”

In short, the text’s composer(s) presumed that its original audience would grasp that יש relates the selected individuals to the larger group of brothers (the indirect referent) whom they will be representing.

Choosing Representatives: Various Verbs and Various Groups
For selecting a specified number of representatives from a group, the Bible includes eleven other instances with the same basic construction that uses the verb הָלַךְ. The various human groups from which selection is made

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41 TDOT (above, n. 11) recognizes the meaning “office or rank” for יש, but only with a genitive construction. HALOT (also n. 11) recognizes “rank” or “position,” but only with a genitive or an appositive construction.

42 The Anchor Bible: Genesis (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1962), ad loc. Nevertheless, Speiser did not render יש directly in this clause, translating it as follows: “he had picked several of his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh.”

43 Gen. 7:2 (which is discussed separately, below, page 18); Deut. 1:23; Josh. 3:12; 4:2; Judg. 4:6; 6:27; 1 Sam. 24:3; Jer. 38:10; 52:25; Ezek. 33:2; and Ruth 4:2.
include: Israelite tribes; Gideon’s servants; Israelite warriors; the king’s servants; privy counselors; citizens of another country; and resident elders. (Arguably all of those chosen are men, but maleness is incidental to the activity of selection.) Four similar cases that employ different verbs, all of which use שָׂא conspicuously in a selection from a larger pool of persons, are:

(Num. 11:16)
š' סִפְקִיָּליִיָּ שָׂאָתְאָיָן פָּאָר

... (Josh. 8:3)
תַּכְּסִים שָׂאָתְאָיָן זַכְּלָא מָלָא שָׁמָא

(Judg. 18:2)
יִשְׂקִלְוַו בְּרֵדֶנֶא | לְמַמְשָׂאֵתְאָיָן אַנְשֵׁי מַמְשָׂאֵתְאָיָן

(II Sam. 21:6)
יָסְלֵל שָׂעֵרְאָיָן אַנְשֵׁי בֵּין

Again the groups to be represented are varied: elders, troops, a tribal clan, and descendants. Most striking is an instance using קָלָא for selection from a group, in which our noun שָׂא refers not to humans but rather to animals:

(II Sam. 21:6)
מְלֶל | לְמַמְשָׂאֵתְאָיָן מַמְשָׂאֵתְאָיָן שָׂעֵרְאָיָן אַנְשֵׁי אָוָאָה

These animals are headed onto Noah’s Ark, where they will represent their species, not only as typical specimens but also as those designated to act on behalf of their species as progenitors. As with the non-human applications discussed earlier, this one makes perfect sense if we construe שָׂא as a relational term.

Note that הוֹשָׂא (highlighted in green) functions the same way as does שָׂא in this passage. It designates a specifically female representative of each species. For another instance where הוֹשָׂא designates non-human representatives, see Zech. 5:9.

**SUMMARY OF THE EVIDENCE**

1. Construing שָׂא as a relational term is preferable to the conventional view, for affiliation is more consistent with ancient Near Eastern thought categories and Israelite social structure.

2. שָׂא hardly behaves like the standalone term פָּרָא, whereas it characteristically behaves like the relational term בָּא.

3. Even without syntactic markers of affiliation:
   - the Bible deploys שָׂא with verbs that presume group membership;
   - the Bible collocates שָׂא with collective nouns as the individual correlate;
   - the Bible uses שָׂא in constructions that single out one of the members of a group; and

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44 For another instance where הוֹשָׂא designates non-human representatives, see Zech. 5:9.
THE NOUN יִשְׂרָאֵל (יִש) IN BIBLICAL HEBREW

• the Bible places יִשְׂרָאֵל conspicuously in constructions and situations that prompt the reader to construe it as a term of affiliation.

4. The widely recognized biblical nuances of יִשְׂרָאֵל as “husband” and as “each” or “any” member (of a group or category) are easily explained by construing יִשְׂרָאֵל as a term of affiliation. These usages account for >3% and 74% of all instances, respectively.

5. More than 1% of biblical instances of יִשְׂרָאֵל refer to entities other than individual human beings. Such usage is easily explained by construing יִשְׂרָאֵל as a term of affiliation.

6. More than 1 out of 10 biblical instances of יִשְׂרָאֵל bear a representational sense that is best understood as a type of affiliation.

7. All told, at least 87% of biblical instances of יִשְׂרָאֵל can be accounted for by construing it as a term of affiliation, and some usages are best explained in just this way.

DISCUSSION

This article began with the suggestion that יִשְׂרָאֵל intrinsically conveys affiliation. It tested the word’s usage to see how far this hypothesis could be sustained. It presumed a semantic coherence for יִשְׂרָאֵל unless the linguistic evidence would compel us to conclude otherwise.

We have seen that not only does the Bible seem to employ יִשְׂרָאֵל most of the time in a manner consistent with a relational sense, but also a sense of affiliation repeatedly generates meaning from what are otherwise anomalous or conspicuous usages of יִשְׂרָאֵל. Thus the hypothesis appears to offer a simple yet elegant explanation for how יִשְׂרָאֵל usually functions—an explanation that seems superior to the conventional view that the primary meaning of יִשְׂרָאֵל is “adult male.”

The analysis has treated biblical Hebrew as a single linguistic system. Although Robert Holmstedt has rightly called such an approach into question, the hypothesis that יִשְׂרָאֵל is primarily a relational term is not

45 In expecting יִשְׂרָאֵל to be a meaningful term, I draw a contrast with the linguist Martin Joos’s rule of thumb that lexicographers should assume the least possible meaning for a hapax (otherwise unknown) word in context, due to the “redundancy of natural language” (see Moisés Silva, Biblical Words and Their Meaning, rev. edn. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994], pp. 153–155). To this editor’s eye, the Bible is a carefully crafted work, in which the artifice and economy of wording make it rather unlike natural language. When יִשְׂרָאֵל is repeatedly conspicuous by its presence or is employed as a leading word, such usage indicates a semantic significance.

sensitive to this assumption. It is therefore a valid simplification for the purposes of this article. Furthermore, my research thus far seems to confirm the assumption of uniformity with regard to אִישׁ. The usage within the Bible is strikingly consistent. The three lexical nuances discussed above appear repeatedly across the whole range of biblical genres, registers, dialects, postulated source documents, and historical stages.

Application to Other Instances

The fact that the Bible’s composers usually employed אִישׁ as a term of affiliation is no guarantee that they always did so. Words can have senses that are unrelated to each other. Without having examined every instance of אִישׁ in the Bible, I mean only to claim that the affiliational aspect of אִישׁ is its primary (most frequent) sense.

Being the primary sense, it is the first one to try upon encountering a given instance of the word in question. The burden of proof is then on whoever would assert that the context justifies construing אִישׁ as something other than a term of affiliation.

Our noun’s relational aspect may not be obvious in many cases. Contemporary readers—who are accustomed to viewing אִישׁ as a standalone term—will easily spot the noun’s direct referent, yet they may find its indirect referent relatively challenging to identify. In the simplest cases, the text designates the indirect referent explicitly. Sometimes it is stated before the word אִישׁ (as shown here in blue; “the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob [as their paterfamilias]”):

In other instances, the indirect referent appears after the word אִישׁ (here, “members of the household”):

Often, however, the indirect referent is only implied. It may require some practice to perceive how אִישׁ functions in such an instance to relate its two referents to each other. To triangulate an implied referent, the text employs a wide variety of constructions, as three further examples will illustrate.

1. Joseph (as the vizier of Egypt) employs אִישׁ in order to single out a member of the group:

In so doing, Joseph refers implicitly to all of his eleven brothers—for the stated condition applies in potential to any of them (“the one [in whose possession the goblet is found].”). The indirect referent is thus the entire party of travelers.

2. The narrator employs שָׂם to point at the unnamed party who attacks Jacob:

יןור וֶלַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִשׁ מֵתוֹ תְוַא הַשַּׁחַר. (Gen. 32:25)

In the process, the narrator defines an indirect referent: the group consisting of participants in that conflict. (In this regard, Jacob could likewise be termed an שׂם.)

3. When counterposed with a term for the Deity, שָׂם refers indirectly to the human species (of which any given שָׂם is a member), as in Balaam’s poetic pronouncement:

לֹא אִשָּׁה אִלּוֹ כְּרַבְדַּרְבּוֹת חַיָּה. (Num. 23:19)

In this case, humankind as a divisible group is implicitly contrasted with God’s singularity.

Implications for Stating English Equivalence

In English dictionaries, grammars, and commentaries on the Bible it is a common practice to gloss שָׂם as “man.” The foregoing analysis suggests that such a practice is misleading, because the two words correspond poorly with regard to affiliation. In biblical Hebrew, שָׂם generally (and perhaps always) retains the flavor of affiliation, whereas the English word “man” often lacks that sense. In 1624, the English poet John Donne famously penned the gender-inclusive statement “No man is an island, entire of itself”; yet if a biblical Hebrew writer were to express such a thought using שָׂם, it would be a tautology. While the word “man” does convey affiliation in certain constructions, it unfortunately fails to do so in most of the contexts in which שָׂם appears in the Bible.48 Given such a limited semantic correspondence between שָׂם and “man,” a more fitting general gloss would appear to be an “affiliate,” or possibly “participant” or “party.”49

48 See further § VII.G.4 of my memorandum “What Does It Mean to Be a ‘Man?’” (above, n. 39).

49 On why a gloss for שָׂם in English should be gender neutral (despite the existence of a feminine counterpart to שָׂם), in Part V of my memorandum “What Does It Mean to Be a ‘Man?’” (above, n. 39) or—more formally and precisely—my article “The Grammar of Social Gender in Biblical Hebrew,” Hebrew Studies, Vol. XLIX (forthcoming).
Implications for Translation

What affects an isolated gloss can also affect the contextual translation of certain passages. For example, the subject of Judg. 18:7 is a small band of warriors on a mission:

יללום מבית לאנשי לית

for which הוא נשית is rendered as “the five men” almost universally, even in translations that have attempted to be gender-sensitive (NRSV, NLT, TNIV). When the NIV rendition appeared (England, 1996) and rendered the phrase as “the five of them,” D. A. Carson objected that because the referent is to warriors (who are presumably males), “there is no good reason to change from ‘men’ to some gender-neutral form.” However, construing איש as a term of affiliation provides such a reason.

Without questioning the presumption that these five figures are all males, it should be noted that the narrator refers to them via a term that clearly calls attention to their affiliation with their tribe (as well as to the non-feminine social gender of at least one of their number). When the narrator first identified these אנשי (in verse 2 of the passage; see above), the sense of affiliation was specifically representational. The NIVI rendering as “the five of them” signifies affiliation, and thus it conveys the Hebrew term’s most relevant meaning, which the conventional rendering does not. In this respect, rendering Judg. 18:7 with the word “men” sacrifices some accuracy in translation.

Another example of how the findings of this article affect translation is in Exod. 32:28, which, as we saw above, treats איש as the individual correlate of פִּדֵי. In other words, פִּדֵי is here the indirect referent of איש:

מְרַעְשִׁים... משתמש אלפי איש

This verse’s wording says nothing about social gender; in context, our noun simply means “members of the group in question.” Rendering the phrase as “of the people . . . three thousand men” (KJV) may have been defensible in 1611, when the word “men” still had a primarily gender-neutral cast. In contemporary English, however, “men” is predominantly a male term, so that a similar rendering today (“three thousand men among the people,”

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52 Mark L. Strauss correctly notes that in this case “it is difficult to discern whether to take תוע as inclusive or exclusive” (Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998], p. 107). The text’s wording itself is agnostic on this question, while context gives little indication as to the social gender of the איש in view.
HCSB; “three thousand men of the people,” Alter, ESV) overtranslates the male gender-marker of ישן. A rendering that expresses affiliation (e.g., “three thousand of the people,” NJPS, NRSV, NIV, TNIV; or “three thousand of the men”) more accurately conveys the main semantic feature of our noun, albeit at the cost of one-to-one correspondence with Hebrew wording, which some translators seek.

Implications for Exegesis
Construing ישן as a term of affiliation solves a number of exegetical cruxes that have resulted from understanding it as “adult male.” For example, at Gen. 4:1, when Eve first gives birth, she bestows the name Cain and explains it via the clause “…ךותב ישן ת…” Claus Westermann notes the classic difficulty, “namely that the word ישן cannot mean the newly born child and that it never occurs with the meaning ‘male child.’” He therefore opines that Eve “sees in the child she has borne the (future) man.” However, in light of the Bible’s abiding interest in population increase, the ancient audience would probably perceive this inaugural infant as remarkable foremost for his being an addition to the human species. And if ישן is a term of affiliation, then what Eve is saying would make perfect sense in context: “I have created a member [of humankind]…”

Likewise in Exodus, when Pharaoh’s courtiers conspicuously propose that “anושי” of the Israelite slaves be dispatched to worship their deity

…”עדים אנושי יעובדים (Exod. 10:7)

they do not mean “the men” (as opposed to “the women”; so translations such as RSV, NJPS, NLT, ESV, HCSB), nor do they mean “the people” in general (so NRSV, NIV, TNIV). Rather, the courtiers take for granted that every ethnic group recognizes that particular officials or elders can represent the populace on certain occasions. Thus the courtiers’ proposal is: send their authorized representatives. This reading explains why Pharaoh then asks Moses, “Who in particular are the ones to go?” (Ex. 10:8). As Rabbi Moses Nachmanides commented more than seven hundred years ago: “Pharaoh initially wanted [only] leaders and elders to go—who would be ‘designated by name’” (at 10:8, quoting Num. 1:17).

As biblical words go, ישן is not a trivial term. It functions as a theme word in the book of Genesis, and it is a key term in the interpretation of

53 On how the male gender-marker in ישן is suppressed by the grammatical construction of this verse, see “The Grammar of Social Gender in Biblical Hebrew” (above, n. 49). That article’s findings, when taken in combination with the findings of this article, call into question § A.4 of the Colorado Springs Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture (1997), which states that ישן “should ordinarily be translated ‘man’ and ‘men.’” The guidelines are available at www.bible-researcher.com/csguidelines.html.

54 This would be the more accurate translation if one were to argue that the particular ישן in view was entirely male (as is sometimes the case).

certain passages. Consequently, if this article’s thesis withstands scrutiny it should significantly affect the prevailing plain-sense exegesis of famous verses in the biblical text.\(^{56}\)

It should also alter our contemporary view of androcentrism in the Hebrew Bible. At least linguistically, the Bible does not treat adult males as “the measure of all things,” despite the claims of many contemporary interpreters—both feminists and complementarians among them.

**CONCLUSION**

This article confirms the thrust of Alison Grant’s (largely ignored) finding that an פל would “be thought of always in relation to [a] particular group or community.” It has also confirmed Grant’s perception of a “membership” sense of פל.

Our conclusions go further than did Grant’s, in two main respects. First, we have identified related nuances for פל—most importantly, that this noun can convey representation. Taken together, the “affiliational” nuances account for at least 87% of all biblical instances of the word. And we have added to Grant’s list of instances that seem to be best explained by construing פל relationally. Therefore, it appears that in biblical Hebrew, פל intrinsically denotes affiliation.

The second conclusion beyond Grant’s work is an ancillary one. In the process of investigating the behavior of the word פל we have seen that its feminine counterpart, פל, functions in much the same way. This correspondence suggests that פל is also a term of affiliation.

Lexically speaking, the relational meaning of פל exists independently of the male semantic content that פל can bear by virtue of its having a feminine counterpart. Although פל can connote “an adult male,” that meaning is found in a small minority of the word’s instances, as determined by the context. In most cases, the maleness of the word פל is not a salient feature.

Construing פל as a term of affiliation (and for the same reasons also פל) holds great promise and thus bears further investigation—in biblical and epigraphic Hebrew, in subsequent versions of Hebrew, and in other Semitic languages in which a cognate term appears.

\(^{56}\) For application to the interpretation of three such passages (Gen. 18:2, 19:5, and Num. 30:3), see Part VIII of my memorandum “What Does It Mean to Be a ‘Man’?” (above, n. 39).