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Mishneh Todah
Studies in Deuteronomy and
Its Cultural Environment
in Honor of
Jeffrey H. Tigay

Edited by
NILI SACHER FOX, DAVID A. GLATT-GILAD,
and MICHAEL J. WILLIAMS

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I

Biblical Naming Reports with על־כֵּן קרא

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This study reviews the naming reports in the MT¹ that contain the phrase על־כֵּן קרא (*al-kēn qārā*) in order to analyze the current practice of regularly rendering the subjects of these reports as indefinite. Though this is understandable in some cases, I contend that many of these subjects can just as well be understood as definite. Whereas the difference may seem insignificant in some passages, rendering the subject as definite is productive in others.

A complete examination of all biblical naming reports is a large and complex undertaking, well beyond the limitations of the present study. This review of the reports containing על־כֵּן קרא thus comprises a small portion of a much larger whole. Also, rather than being an exhaustive study in which a wide variety of commentators are sampled and quoted, this is more an exploratory essay, making only limited reference to a few commentators and translations. The questions asked and the results obtained are hopefully applicable to other studies of naming reports as well.

Terminology and Background

The designation *naming report* identifies a passage that announces the naming of a place, person, or thing. Naming reports are formulaic and typically recount an explanation of a name and its origin based on circumstances that gave rise to the name.

Many scholars have commented on one or another of the naming reports in the Hebrew Bible, but certain major studies stand out. One of these is Johannes

Author's note: It is a pleasure and an honor to contribute to this Festschrift for Jeffrey H. Tigay. I am grateful for Jeff's mentoring me when I was his student and for his example of ongoing, model scholarship.

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1. All English Bible quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

Fichtner's, which classifies biblical naming reports as Form I or Form II.² A Form I report contains ויקרא (or a grammatical variant) followed by the name and an etymological etiology for the name. It is primarily employed to relate the naming of persons, and the agent of naming is often explicitly contained in the report.

Fichtner designates as Form II naming reports those that narrate the basis for the etymological etiology, followed by the name, given in a clause beginning with על-כן קרא. This formula occurs in the Bible much less often than Form I reports and is primarily used with place names.³

About a decade after Fichtner's article, Burke Long published a monograph in which he highlights concerns with Fichtner's study and introduces the designation "mixed type" to help account for the variety of formulations that include varying degrees of Fichtner's Forms I and II.⁴ Concerning Form II naming reports, Long claims,

The act of naming is not narrated. Rather, the formula expresses a logical inference from speech, reported event, or descriptive report. The link between these elements and the name is always explicit in a word play. . . . Form II breaks the recitation with a logical inference whose function . . . cannot be fully understood as simple historical narration. . . . The narrative movement, as it were, ceases and a conclusion is drawn. . . . The inferential function is most sharply distinguished from historical recitation where the subject of the verb is indefinite. Such is the case in most of the occurrences of Form II.⁵

While aspects of Long's assessment are acceptable, I question the basis for his conclusion that the "act of naming is not narrated." Whether the subject in Form II naming reports is definite or indefinite is a matter of interpretation, because the subject is only implied, not explicit. Moreover, there are biblical passages in which על-כן is followed by a verb other than קרא and the subject is definite (for example, Gen 42:21, 47:22; and Josh 14:14). And there are at least a few Form II naming reports in which the subject must be read as definite (see below).⁶ Thus, Long's claim that most of these reports cannot function

2. Johannes Fichtner, "Die etymologische Ätiologie in den Namengebungen der geschichtlichen Bücher des alten Testaments," VT 6 (1956) 372-96.

3. Fichtner, "Die etymologische Ätiologie," 379-80 (with further comments and examples through p. 386).

4. Burke O. Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* (BZAW 108; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1968); 21 examples of his "mixed type" are cited on pp. 37-56.

5. Long, *Etiological Narrative*, 6-7.

6. Long recognizes this situation and provides a few comments and representative citations (*ibid.*, 7).

to relate the “simple historical narration” of the origins of a name (even though they supply the necessary information for an inference to be drawn) is debatable.

Other publications later than Fichtner’s and Long’s contributing to the interpretation of naming reports include studies by Brevard Childs, Moshe Garsiel, and Timothy Finlay.⁷

The Formula על-כן קרא in Biblical Naming Reports

There are 21 Form II naming reports in the MT.⁸ This is a relatively small number compared with the many dozens of Form I naming reports. However, Form II reports differ sufficiently from Form I reports to warrant a specific study.

The Form II report formula is uncomplicated. The adverbial על-כן means ‘therefore’ or ‘so’. The Qal perfect of קרא translates as ‘called’ or, by extension, ‘named’. Reports employing this formulaic expression—על-כן קרא—always contain the name of the person or place that is named. Garsiel has rightly observed the following about naming reports in general:

The biblical writers, in most cases, provide explanations which are based upon the assumption that that name is unique and that it was given in accordance with a specific occasion. . . . The biblical writers were committed to literary considerations rather than to linguistic ones. . . . In the biblical text, the naming explanation is always attached to the naming, renaming, etc.; and it is based upon the literary convention that the name is unique, and that it was invented by its giver in order to deliver a message or to convey a meaning. The explanation for the name is stated quite explicitly either by a plot character or by the narrator.⁹

This certainly seems true of Form II reports. There is no doubt that examples of an indefinite subject occur in the MT in various contexts. As Joüon states, “Quite often, the 3rd pers. m. sg., with or without a participle, expresses the

7. Brevard S. Childs, “A Study of the Formula ‘Until This Day,’” *JBL* 82 (1963) 279–92; Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991); and Timothy D. Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

8. The phrase על-כן קרא occurs in Jer 44:23, but the verb קרא is the homophonic linguistic root meaning ‘to befall’. It has therefore been excluded from this study.

9. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 18–20. Garsiel also correctly asserts that

the liberty taken by the biblical authors in these explanations has been termed by some scholars “folk etymology.” Such a definition misses the point; the explanations function as a literary device and are designed to enrich the literary unit. What we see here is by no means a popular and shallow interpretation based upon a lack of knowledge, but rather a deliberate deviation from the linguistic rules and norms of the time applied as a technique by subtle narrators in order to make a point. (18–19)

vague subject one, sometimes also someone.”¹⁰ Similarly, Waltke and O’Connor observe, “The vast majority of Hebrew verbs have personal subjects; they may be definite, as usual, or indefinite, as with the pseudo-passive use of the third-person masculine plural or, less often, singular.”¹¹ Furthermore, some of the naming reports with על-כן קרא seem best rendered as indefinite (see below). The question raised here is, should every one of them be rendered with an indefinite subject and “pseudo-passive” sense (“it was called”) by default, unless the text demands otherwise (which is the case when the verb is 3fs)?

Discussion of Naming Reports with על-כן קרא

In the following review, four translations are regularly consulted to illustrate how these reports have been rendered: the LXX for an ancient perspective,¹² the NRSV (1989) and the NJPSV (1985/1999) for modern perspectives, and the KJV, a popular translation in past centuries, to help illustrate differences in the history of English translations of the Bible.

Before moving to the reports themselves, two issues must be considered, both of which deal with the “intentionality” of the biblical narrators.¹³ First, J. P. Fokkelman speaks of “sparse signals” that “offer a direct view of the writer’s scale of values . . . and point of view” in which “the action stops momentarily.” Two of these signals are “information” and “description.”¹⁴ Whereas the information in naming reports containing על-כן קרא is not ideologically charged in the same way that, for example, the final chapters of the book of Judges are, one must wonder what the narrators intended when including information about the origins of a name, or at least the tradition pertaining to the circumstances in which a name originated. The phrase על-כן קרא in a naming report interrupts the narrative flow to provide a description. Was it merely intended to

10. P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (trans. T. Muraoka; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991) 578.

11. B. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 376 (§22.7a). See also GKC, p. 460 (§144d).

12. Some text in the naming reports in the LXX reads differently from the text of these reports in the MT. These variations are not considered here, but only the basic grammar of the naming report. All Form II reports in the MT appear in the LXX.

13. J. P. Fokkelman uses this term while observing that “the narrative prose of the Old Testament is characterized by an ‘intentionality’ which differs from that of the works of fiction of Western literature” (*Narrative Art in Genesis* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975] 7).

14. J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 69–72 for discussion of information and description; quotation on p. 69.

recount that a place came to be called by a particular designation resulting from a unique set of circumstances? Or, in at least some cases, was the descriptive information intended to convey more? As I will argue below, narrators, having chosen the so-called Form II report, often seem interested in conveying the act of naming by the narrative hero in addition to merely stopping the action to indicate a name tradition. In this view, a narrator was at least as interested in the namer and the naming as in the name itself, because naming had important cultural and literary functions.¹⁵

Second, P. J. van Dyk asserts that many etiological passages have a rhetorical organization and function designed not only to enhance interest but also to add credibility. He insists that, by referring “to a concrete phenomenon that originated during the course of events related in the narrative,” such as “the name of a person or a place,” a narrator provides “a powerful and ‘objective’ witness to testify to the credibility of the narrative.”¹⁶ Whereas indefinite naming reports with על-כן קרא could merely be following a tradition of referring to a place or person by a particular name to give credibility to a narrative, it seems more likely that a narrator’s work would have been considered more rhetorically persuasive, more credible, if it was understood to provide information that a particular person named a particular place, not just that it became known by its designation. Namers in Form II reports with subjects classified below as “definite” or “plausibly definite” include Leah, Rachel, Jacob, Samson, and David—well-known individuals in biblical narrative traditions.

The following analysis begins with Form II naming reports in which the subject is usually translated as definite. This is followed by reports in which the subject is usually rendered as indefinite for grammatical or syntactical reasons, reports containing the phrase עַד הַיּוֹם (הַזֶּה), reports in which the subjects can plausibly be read as definite, and finally the report in Gen 11:9, which will receive special consideration.

15. A further consideration in this regard is that some of the place names reported in Form II reports are not well known (at least from our limited perspective).

16. P. J. van Dyk, “The Function of So-Called Etiological Elements in Narratives,” *ZAW* 102 (1990) 22–23. Van Dyk suggests that “rhetorical devices” of this sort can function to increase interest in the text, provide aid as mnemonic devices, and help enhance credibility (p. 22). Consider also in this regard Robert Alter’s comments on the function of “narration that is woven through or around dialogue” (*The Art of Biblical Narrative* [New York: Basic Books, 1981] 77–78). While he does not specifically address naming reports, his observation about this sort of narration, communicating “data ancillary to the plot” and “mirroring, [or] confirming . . . of statements made in direct discourse by the characters,” is applicable here.

Reports Usually Translated with a Definite Subject

Gen 29:35: She [Leah] conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD"; *therefore she named him Judah* [עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ יְהוּדָה]; then she ceased bearing. (NRSV; so LXX, KJV, and NJPSV¹⁷)

This Form II report is the fourth of four naming reports in four verses, all recounting Leah's bearing her sons. The 3fs verbal forms throughout the verse make it one of the few reports of this sort in which the implied subject of the verb is unanimously considered grammatically conclusive and definite. The narrator conveys the identity of the namer, Leah, which must be understood as important in its own right.¹⁸

Gen 30:6: Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son"; *therefore she named him Dan* [עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ דָן]. (NRSV; so LXX, KJV, and NJPSV)

This report is another case in which the gender of the verb in the naming phrase, עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה, matches the feminine gender of the rest of the report, precluding the option of rendering the subject as indefinite. The narrator recounts that Rachel did the naming, not that her son came to be known as Dan.¹⁹

Gen 31:48: Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." *Therefore he called it Galeed* [עַל־כֵּן קָרָאָה שְׁמוֹ גַלְעָד]. (NRSV; LXX, KJV, and NJPSV are indefinite)

The NRSV translators apparently understood Laban (or perhaps Jacob) to be the definite subject in this verse, based on the preceding verse and the first portion of v. 48. Jacob used the Hebrew name "Galeed" in v. 47, in contrast to

17. The use of "so LXX, KJV, and NJPSV" and the like in the review of passages that follows is intended to convey which of the other sampled translations in comparison with the NRSV represent the subject as definite or indefinite. When the LXX rendition of the subject in a Form II report is cited as definite or indefinite, the assessment is based on whether the Greek verb is active or passive, respectively. An active verb is accepted as indicating that the implied subject of the naming report was read by the translators as definite, while a passive verb implies that they read the report with an indefinite subject.

18. Fokkelman makes insightful comments on how Leah and Rachel are the focus of the narrated activities in Gen 29:31–30:24, which thus well qualifies them as the agents of naming (*Narrative Art in Genesis*, 131–37). I am not aware of anyone who renders קָרָאָה with a 3fs *indefinite* subject.

19. These examples of Form II reports with definite subjects have produced varying explanations. Fichtner, for example, theorized that earlier sources had purer forms of the basic naming formulations, but these sometimes became altered in later redactional activity—in this case, in Genesis 29–30 ("Die etymologische Ätiologie," 382).

the Aramaic name given by Laban. But the plain sense of the received text as it continues on into vv. 48–50 suggests the narrator probably intended Laban as the subject of the phrase על-כן קרא at the end of v. 48.²⁰

Even though most of the sampled translations do not render this report with a definite subject, it is listed in this category due to the rendering of the NRSV, with which I concur. An indefinite rendering raises the question, why does the narrator provide “information” and “description” about the circumstances in which these names (Galeed and Mizpah) arose but not the identity of the namer?

The first two of the three naming reports just reviewed (Gen 29:35 and 30:6) illustrate how some Form II reports can only be rendered with a definite subject because of the grammar of the report. But the grammar in some reports is inconsistent.

Reports Usually Translated as Indefinite for Grammatical or Syntactical Reasons

The following naming reports are, in their present condition in the MT, rendered with indefinite subjects. They each contain a grammatical or syntactical challenge to reading the subject as definite. They are thus best read as indefinite.

Gen 16:13–14: So she named the LORD who spoke to her, “You are El-roi”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi [על-כן קרא לבאר להי ראי]; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. (NRSV; so NJPSV and KJV; LXX is definite)

At this point, I leave aside any discussion of Hagar’s naming of the Lord in v. 13 (a Form I report); the verb in the naming report of Beer-lahai-roi in v. 14 is 3ms. Even though the report draws on the content of v. 13, its subject is regularly rendered as indefinite because of this grammatical mismatch. It is unlikely that the narrator is suggesting that the “angel of the Lord” mentioned in vv. 7–11 has named Beer-lahai-roi. Therefore, the naming report in v. 14, lacking a persuasively viable alternative, is best rendered as indefinite, as in the English translations sampled. Of course, an original על-כן*קראה could have become the present על-כן קרא. However, a reading of this sort has little textual support (but see the active rendering of the verb in the LXX²¹). GKC

20. Actually, two names are given in the report (vv. 48–49), Galeed and Mizpah.

21. As noted above, saying the LXX rendered the subject as definite means the verb is active, not passive. Because the indication of gender is not inherent in the verbal form, the subject could be he/she/it. It seems most likely that the LXX translator’s use of an active verb form in Gen 16:14 indicates an intention to convey that Hagar, “she,” was the namer (as opposed to the angel mentioned previously or an implied namer in a passive sense).

and Joüon, for example, cite this naming report as an example of a biblical passage with an indefinite subject.²²

The report of the naming of Levi in Gen 29:34 (discussed below) exhibits a similar mismatch between the 3fs grammar in the majority of the report and the 3ms form of קרא. However, in this verse the inconsistency is quite likely the result of textual corruption.

Exod 15:23: When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. *That is why it was called Marah* [על-כן קרא-שמהן [מרה]]. (NRSV; so LXX, KJV, and NJPSV)

In this report the 3ms verbal form in the naming phrase breaks from the plural forms at the end of v. 22 and the beginning of v. 23, in which the circumstances providing the motivation for the naming are narrated. None of the sampled translations represent Moses as the subject of קרא. The subject is regularly rendered indefinite.²³

1 Chr 11:7: “David resided in the stronghold; *therefore it was called the city of David* [על-כן קרא-לו עיר דויד]. (NRSV; so NJPSV; LXX and KJV are definite)

David is the subject in the first portion of this report, but the verb in the naming phrase is plural. The report is rendered indefinite in modern translations. However, the older KJV and the LXX translate v. 7 with a plural definite subject, “therefore they called it,” either implying naming by the Jebusites (v. 5) or, more likely, understanding “they” as David’s officials or subjects, for which there is no explicit antecedent.

1 Chr 11:7 parallels 2 Sam 5:9, which contains a Form I report (ויקרא) narrating the renaming of the former Jebusite city by David: “David occupied the stronghold, and *named it the city of David* [ויקרא-לה עיר דוד].” There is an apparent discrepancy between these two traditions for naming the “city of David.” As Japhet has wondered, “is this [על-כן קרא in 1 Chr 11:7] merely a linguistic-stylistic alteration of the Chronicler, or his *Vorlage*, to a more common aetiological formula, or does the impersonal phrasing reflect a different

22. GKC, p. 460 (§144d); Joüon, *Grammar*, 578.

23. A similar situation (plural verb forms in the explanation followed by קרא in the naming phrase) also presents itself in the Form II report in Gen 50:11 (“When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, *they said* [ויאמרו], ‘This is a grievous mourning on the part of the Egyptians.’ *Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim* [על-כן קרא שמה אבל מצרים]; it is beyond the Jordan”). However, the LXX implies a definite rendering of the subject in this report.

understanding of the renaming, not by David but as a result of a historical process?"²⁴

Obviously, there is no sure answer to Japhet's question. However, the data suggest a preferred style of narration may be involved. All three Form II naming reports in Chronicles have the plural form of the verb (על-כן קראו). Two of these three—1 Chr 11:7 and 1 Chr 14:11 (discussed just below)—differ from their parallel passages in 2 Sam 5:9 (ויקרא) and 5:20 (קרא), respectively. There is no parallel for 2 Chr 20:26 (discussed below).

1 Chr 14:11: So he went up to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. David said, "God has burst out against my enemies by my hand, like a bursting flood." *Therefore that place is called Baal-perazim* [על-כן קראו שם-המקום]. (NRSV; so NJPSV; LXX and KJV are definite) [ההוא בעל פרצים].

1 Chr 14:11 parallels 2 Sam 5:20 (discussed below). Minor textual differences exist between these two reports, especially between the grammar of the opening phrase and of the naming phrase. In 1 Chr 14:10, David asks the Lord if he should go up (האעלה) against the Philistines, and the answer is yes, go up (עלה). Where 2 Sam 5:20 begins with ויבא דוד, the plural verb ויעלו begins 1 Chr 14:11, continuing the use of the thematic verb from the previous verse. The plural ויעלו is rendered as singular in the NRSV, apparently based on the singular verbal form in the LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate; the NJPSV also accepts a singular verb and adds a proper name ("David ascended Baal-perazim").

If one understands the verb קראו to have a definite subject in 1 Chr 14:11, it would have to be the Philistines or, more likely, the general Israelite population (with no immediate antecedent).²⁵ This varies from the tradition in 2 Sam 5:20, if one takes that report as indicating that David himself named Baal-perazim (see below). The current, but not the older, approach is to translate 1 Chr 14:11 with an indefinite subject (so NRSV and NJPSV). As already noted, this seems to be the preferred style of narration for all three Form II naming reports in Chronicles—1 Chr 11:7, 14:11; and 2 Chr 20:26 (discussed below)—even when two of these three reports have parallels with singular verb forms.

24. Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 241. It is not clear to me why Japhet considers על-כן קרא, whether plural or singular, a "more common aetiological formula" than the Form I formula (ויקרא) in 2 Sam 5:9.

25. This is presumably the understanding that underlies the literal translation of the MT in the KJV: "They came up. . . . David smote them. . . . David said. . . . They called the name of that place."

Gen 25:30: Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” *Therefore he was called Edom* [על־כן קרא־שמו אדום]. (NRSV; so LXX, KJV, and NJPSV)

The situation in Gen 25:30 is different from the preceding examples. Agreement in grammatical number is not the issue here but rather how to relate the naming phrase, usually rendered as a parenthetical clause, to the greater literary context. This challenge helps explain why this report is routinely rendered with an indefinite subject.

Of course, in the world of the narrative, no one would have known about Esau’s statement if it had not been communicated by Jacob (or less likely, Esau). Because of the many passages in the Hebrew Bible where different parties speak and act back and forth but the narration only employs pronouns (for example, Gen 14:19–20, 15:5–7), there may be some reason to reconsider the indefinite rendering of this report. However, it remains in the category of most likely indefinite in this study, due to the long practice of reading the subject as indefinite and to avoid the appearance of special pleading.

Reports with על־כן קרא and (הזה) עד היום, Usually Rendered as Indefinite

Of the 21 naming reports with על־כן קרא, 4 also also contain the phrase עד היום (3) or just עד־היום (1). This phrase in a naming report typically indicates that a name was used over a period of time, with the subject of the naming verb rendered as indefinite.

2 Chr 20:26: On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed the LORD; *therefore that place has been called the Valley of Beracah to this day* [על־כן קראו את־שם המקום ההוא עמק ברכה עד־היום]. (NRSV; so NJPSV and KJV; LXX is definite)

The plural number of the naming phrase, על־כן קראו, matches the plural number of the larger report in which it is embedded, and the subject could be easily read as definite, if not for the concluding phrase of the verse: עד־היום, ‘to this day’. Because of its durative or “frequentative” sense, this additional phrase seems to require an indefinite translation of the subject in this naming report.²⁶

Childs observes that 2 Chr 20:26 (Valley of Beracah), Josh 7:26 (Valley of Achor), and Judg 18:12 (Mahaneh-dan) are “typical” of etymological etiologies

26. Childs uses “frequentative” in relation to the verb קרא in etymological etiologies such as 2 Chr 20:26 (“The Formula ‘Until This Day,’” 281). See also Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 798.

that contain both על-כן קרא and עד היום (הזה).²⁷ The latter two of these reports are similar to the report in 2 Chr 20:26 and so require no discussion here.²⁸

Understandably, the subjects in these three reports in the MT are read as indefinite due to the influence of the phrase עד היום (הזה). However, one wonders when the phrase עד היום (הזה) became part of these narrative reports. As Childs concludes, “a study of the content of the etiological material reveals that, in the great majority of cases, the formula, ‘until this day,’ has been secondarily added as a redactional commentary on existing traditions.”²⁹ Thus, these three naming reports may well have started their literary lives with subjects intended as definite and were only later altered by the addition of עד היום (הזה).

Judg 15:19: So God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came from it. When he [Samson] drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore it was named *En-hakkore* [על-כן קרא שמה עין הקורא], which is at Lehi to this day. (NRSV; so LXX and NJPSV; KJV is definite)

Judg 15:19 is a Form II naming report that can plausibly be rendered with a definite subject despite its ending with עד היום הזה, because it is clearly different from the three reports just mentioned. The concluding relative clause echoes a similar phrase earlier in the verse (אשר-בלחי), but it is not an organic part of the naming report. Rather, the concluding clause appears to have been appended by a redactor or copyist. Childs cites this passage (Judg 15:19) and others as examples of reports in which “the concluding formula [עד היום הזה] has been separated from the verb and now modifies a noun or pronoun instead. . . . The effect is to dissolve the causal connection. . . . The formula becomes

27. Childs, “The Formula ‘Until This Day,’” 281.

28. Josh 7:26: “and raised over him a great heap of stones that remains to this day [עד היום הזה]; then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore that place to this day is called the Valley of Achor [הוא עמק עכור עד היום הזה].” Judg 18:12: “and went up and encamped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. On this account that place is called Mahaneh-dan to this day [על-כן קראו למקום ההוא מחנה-דן עד היום]; it is west of Kiriath-jearim.”

For purposes of comparison, the subject of the naming report in Josh 7:26 is rendered as indefinite in the NRSV, NJPSV, and KJV, but definite in the LXX. All four sample translations rendered the subject of the report in Judg 18:12 as indefinite.

29. Childs, “The Formula ‘Until This Day,’” 289–90. See also Jeffrey C. Geoghegan, *The Time, Place, and Purpose of the Deuteronomistic History: The Evidence of “Until This Day”* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2006) 142, who has affirmed that “the phrase [עד היום הזה], following Childs, is a redactional comment upon a received tradition.” Geoghegan provides a convenient overview of many scholars’ views on the use of עד היום הזה (pp. 9–41). He disagrees with some of Childs’s conclusions, but not the one in question here.

rather an archaeological note which expresses the extension in time of a past phenomenon into the present.”³⁰

Given that Samson is understood as the definite but not explicit subject of two verbs in v. 18 and two verbs prior to the naming phrase in v. 19 (three if *וּתְשַׁבּ רוּחוֹ* is counted), there is no grammatical reason to render as indefinite the implied subject of the verb *קרא*. The report can be read as indicating that Samson named the place (so *קַיֵּן*)—a “past phenomenon” with an “archaeological note” appended—instead of an indefinite subject. This Form II report is thus classified along with others, discussed next, in which the subject can be plausibly understood as definite.

*Reports Usually Rendered as Indefinite but with Plausibly
Definite Subjects*

There are a number of Form II naming reports that are routinely rendered with indefinite subjects in modern translations that can be plausibly rendered as definite.

Gen 29:34: Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons”; *therefore he was named Levi* [*עַל־כֵּן קרא שְׁמוֹ לוֹי*]. (NRSV; so KJV, NRSV; LXX is definite)

The four naming notices recounting the birth and naming of Leah’s children (vv. 32–35) occur in a series—two with *וּתְקרא שְׁמוֹ* followed by two with *עַל־כֵּן קרא*—three of which grammatically require a definite, feminine subject. It is thus likely that the MT’s report in Gen 29:34 (Levi) has suffered the loss of a letter: *קראה* becoming *קרא*. If so, then this report would also be definite, Leah being understood as the subject. This is the reading—3fs—in the Septuagint, Samaritan, and Syriac text traditions.³¹ The KJV, NRSV, and NJPSV follow the MT, rendering the concluding phrase of this report as indefinite: “therefore he was named Levi.” But the “original” Hebrew text of v. 34 quite likely had the 3fs *קראה* and should be read with a definite subject.³²

Gen 33:17: But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; *therefore the place is called Succoth* [*עַל־כֵּן קרא שֵׁם־הַמְּקוֹם סוּכוֹת*]. (NRSV; so NJPSV and KJV; LXX is definite)

30. Childs, “The Formula ‘Until This Day,’” 282.

31. See, conveniently, Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible*, 116 and n. 114.

32. My handling of this report is the sole exception in this study to dealing with the naming reports with *עַל־כֵּן קרא* as they occur in the MT. The plain sense of the pericope and the evidence of the versions seems to warrant this.

Is the narrator here recounting that Jacob inaugurated the name Succoth for this place or merely reporting that in the course of time the place became known as Succoth when people reflected on the tradition that Jacob supposedly built booths there? There is no grammatical reason to render the implied subject of קרא as indefinite. And because the implied subjects of the verbs ויבן 'built' and עשה 'made' in the middle portion of v. 17 are regularly read as definite, there is good reason also to read the subject in the naming phrase as definite (as in the LXX). The general syntactic pattern in this report is no different from the pattern in Gen 29:35, in which the subjects of the initial verbs and the naming verb קראה are all read as definite. Translations that render the subject of the report in Gen 33:17 (Succoth) as indefinite seem to be based on an a priori decision regarding a translation philosophy of Form II naming reports, not on the plain flow of the passage, because there are no difficulties with the Hebrew grammar or syntax.

1 Sam 23:28: So Saul stopped pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape [על-כן קראו למקום ההוא [סלע המזחלקות]]. (NRSV; so LXX and NJPSV; KJV is definite: "they called it")

The subject of the plural קראו in v. 28 is usually rendered as indefinite, but narrative logic suggests that if Saul's or David's men had not named this spot in the wilderness, no one else would have known about it. Even if this etiology was manufactured by the narrator (for what reason?), a modicum of narrative plausibility can be expected. It seems likely that the narrator intended a definite subject here (as in the KJV).³³

2 Sam 5:20: So David came to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them [the Philistines] there. He said, "The LORD has burst forth against my enemies before me, like a bursting flood." Therefore that place is called Baal-perazim [על-כן קרא שם-המקום ההוא בעל פרצים]. (NRSV; so LXX and NJPSV; KJV is definite)

Similar to Gen 33:17 (Jacob at Succoth), the explicitly indicated subject in the first portion of this report (David) is active in speaking and doing. The

33. This report shares similarities with 1 Chr 11:7, discussed above. I placed that report in the category of "Reports Usually Rendered as Indefinite" because of the concern that the Chronicler used a plural verb form (קראו) to convey an indefinite subject in all three Form II naming reports in Chronicles. I have included 1 Sam 23:28 here, in the "Plausibly Definite" category, because this sort of trend is not evident in the book of Samuel, because of narrative considerations, and because it seems likely to me that this act of escaping could be seen by David's men as divine deliverance, giving serious reason to commemorate the spot with a name.

implied subject of the verb וַיֹּאמֶר 'said' is clearly David. There is no compelling reason not to carry that definite subject forward into the naming phrase (as in the KJV): "Therefore he [David] called that place Baal-perazim." It seems likely that the narrator was not only providing an explanation for what the name of a place became but also, perhaps more importantly, was identifying the naming agent, the narrative hero who originated the name. Clearly, identification such as this was considered valuable in some naming reports, as evidenced by the many Form I reports in which the subject is explicit.

2 Sam 5:20 is paralleled by 1 Chr 14:11, already discussed above. The subject in the naming phrase of 1 Chr 14:11 (עַל־כֵּן קָרָא) was considered indefinite, in large measure because of the consistent attestation of קָרָא in the three Form II naming reports in Chronicles.

The Form II report in Judg 15:19 (Samson at En-hakkore, discussed above, with the phrase עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה) can also be plausibly understood with a definite subject. Although the case for rendering the subject in the naming reports with עַל־כֵּן קָרָא in Gen 19:22 and 21:31 as definite is not as strong as in the passages just reviewed, it is possible that they can be so understood.³⁴ This means that, in Gen 19:22, the angel (apparently the intended subject of the active verb in the LXX) provides the name "Zoar," and in Gen 21:31, Abraham (apparently the intended subject of the active verb in the LXX), who is speaking in the previous verse, provides the name Beer-sheba. The NRSV and NPSV translate the subjects in both these reports as indefinite, whereas the KJV renders the subject of Gen 19:22 as indefinite but definite in 21:31 ("he [Abraham] called").

Commenting on the naming reports with עַל־כֵּן קָרָא in Gen 19:22 (Zoar), 33:17 (Succoth), Judg 15:19 (En-hakkore), and 2 Sam 5:20 (Baal-perazim), Long states, "The subject of the verb [קָרָא] may be definite. . . . All four passages are structured in a way typical of other Form II occurrences. While certainty is not possible because of the ambiguity in the Hebrew grammar, it seems likely that these four cases also must be read with an indefinite subject."³⁵ True, we cannot be certain, but, since the Hebrew is ambiguous, why does it seem "likely" that these passages should be read as having indefinite subjects? Consideration of intent, including the narrative credibility the namer-hero provides,

34. Gen 19:22: "Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.' Therefore the city was called Zoar [עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם־הָעִיר צוֹעַר]." Gen 21:31: "Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba [עַל־כֵּן קָרָא לְמוֹקוֹם הַהוּא בְּאֵר שֶׁבַע]; because there both of them swore an oath."

35. Long, *Etiological Narrative*, 7 and n. 9.

suggests that many of these Form II reports could and should be read with definite subjects.

Esth 9:26: *Therefore these days are called Purim* [על-כן קראו לימים האלה פורים], from the word Pur [הפור]. (NRSV; so LXX and NJPSV; KJV is definite)

The plural form of the verb could plausibly refer to “the Jews” who had cause and instruction to celebrate (so the definite rendering in the KJV). There is no grammatical mismatch in this report. And consideration of important narrative information and credibility may be granted: not only did the holiday come to be called Purim, but it was so named by the very Jews who experienced its origins.

Genesis 11:9

Because of its canonical priority and unusual form, Gen 11:1–9 has been separated out for individual treatment.

Gen 11:9: *Therefore it was called Babel* [על-כן קרא שמה בבל], because there the LORD confused [כבל] the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (NRSV; so LXX, KJV, and NJPSV)

This report is different from most Form II naming reports in that על-כן קרא does not initiate the concluding phrase of the report. Here, the naming phrase is followed by the explanation for the name, as is the case in Form I reports (with ויקרא).³⁶ Long observes, “The singular subject of *qr*’ can only refer to Yahweh in this context. But this is a highly unlikely reading. Therefore, the inference must be understood with an indefinite subject.”³⁷ Long’s view that YHWH as the implied, definite subject is “highly unlikely,” despite his claim that the subject of the naming verb “can only refer to Yahweh,” seems entirely based on his contention that the subjects in Form II naming reports should be generally rendered indefinite.³⁸ Similarly, regarding this naming report, Victor Hamilton comments: “It is not clear whether the name Babel is given to this

36. Ibid., 24–25.

37. Ibid., 24.

38. Long also cites Gen 11:9 as an example of a report in which the “subject of *qr*’ cannot refer meaningfully to the agent [of naming] in the immediately preceding context” (ibid., 7 and n. 8). That I disagree with this claim will become evident in the remarks that follow.

city by Yahweh, by the narrator, or by somebody else. Hence, the verb must be understood as an indefinite subject—it was called.”³⁹

The method in these approaches is clear: if the subject is not clearly definite or if a particular subject cannot be preferred among a few possibilities, then render the subject as indefinite. But the subject, whether masculine or feminine, is never explicit in Form II naming reports. It is always implied by the verbal form, a situation that creates some ambiguity and allows for competing interpretations.

On one hand, the case for reading the subject of קרא in Gen 11:9 as definite (YHWH) would appear stronger if the subject in each of the next two clauses in v. 9 were implied rather than explicit, as in the MT. On the other hand, there is no functional difference between the Form II report in Gen 11:9 (preceded by “so the LORD scattered” in v. 8) and the Form I report in 2 Sam 5:9: “David lived in . . . and he named [קרא] it . . . and David built . . .” The syntax of reports of this sort correlates with the syntax of Gen 11:9, sustaining the plausibility of reading Gen 11:9 definitely.

If one accepts that the narrator intended to communicate that the city not only came to be called Babel but that YHWH so named it, one finds greater polemical “punch” to the message of the narrative. As Robert Gordon observes when commenting on the fact that Babel but not Jerusalem is named in the biblical primeval account, “Babylon-Babel does feature in Genesis . . . as the butt of a biblical satire that dismisses the best efforts of the imperial enemy as nothing more than hollow human pretension.”⁴⁰ Likewise, Fokkelman states, “‘Babel’ is the product of *bālal*,’ so Babel means ‘muddle.’ This is the conclusion which the Israelitic [*sic*] observer has left us . . . and he does so with a sneering pun.”⁴¹ The effect of this satire or pun is heightened if it is YHWH who not only confused the language of the people and scattered them but who pronounced the name of the results, a name the narrator purposefully relates to the verb *b-l-l*.⁴²

39. Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 357.

40. Robert P. Gordon, *Holy Land, Holy City: Sacred Geography and the Interpretation of the Bible* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2004) 16.

41. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 12.

42. As Patrick D. Miller has rightly claimed, “The primary focus of the story in Gen 11:1–9 is the city. . . . The conclusion focuses on the city” (“Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology,” *HAR* 9 [1985] 242). Miller reads the report in v. 9 with an indefinite subject. However, the import of his observation is increased if one understands YHWH as the implied subject of קרא.

There is no biblically based reason to resist understanding YHWH as the naming agent in Gen 11:9, because in the Bible YHWH is associated with the naming or renaming of people and places.⁴³ Furthermore, Genesis 1 establishes the importance of naming and the power of the namer in relating that אלהים created and 'called' or named (קרא ויקרא) "day," "night," "sky," "earth," and "seas" (1:5, 8, 10). This divine naming activity and its significance provides the biblical model for "the man" (Gen 2:19, 20, 23; 3:20) and all others after him. Not that this consideration of divine naming elsewhere in the Bible is sufficient reason by itself to read the subject of the report in Gen 11:9 as definite, but it provides a plausible context in which to read it this way.

A survey of naming reports in Akkadian sources provides a picture functionally similar to what is represented in the Bible. In addition to passages that relate the naming of people and places by people, there are passages in which gods name other gods, temples, and people.⁴⁴ Important for this study, the name of a city is credited to divine origin—*bāb-ilim*, Babylon.⁴⁵ In the so-called Epic of Creation (*Enuma Elish*), Marduk proclaims, "I shall call [its] name [Babylon], (meaning) 'House of the Great Gods.'" Among other things, the assembled gods reply, "Babylon, to which you have given name, make our [stopping place] there forever."⁴⁶ Also, the prologue to Hammurabi's law collection claims:

When the august god Anu, king of the Anunnaku deities, and the god of Enlil, lord of heaven and earth, who determines the destinies of the land, allotted supreme power over all peoples to the god Marduk, the firstborn son of the god Ea, exalted him among the Igigu deities, named the city of Babylon with its august name and made it supreme within the regions of the world.⁴⁷

Whereas these assertions (with definite subjects) for the divine naming of Babylon cannot substantiate a definite rendering of YHWH as the subject in Gen 11:9, they certainly complement a reading of this sort.

43. YHWH instructs on the renaming of some people (for example, Gen 17:5, 15), instructs some parents on naming their children (for example, Isa 8:3; Hos 1:4, 6, 9), and indicates what some future name-titles of Jerusalem will be (for example, Isa 1:26, 62:2–4; Zech 8:2; all with Niphal, "shall be called"). Even though many of these passages are in the prophetic tradition, cumulatively they provide a context in which to consider as plausible the naming of a city by YHWH in the narrative tradition.

44. See examples in CAD N/1 s.v. "nabû," 32–34.

45. For a discussion of the forms and use of this name to designate Babylon, see A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts* (Leuven: Peeters, 1992) 253–55.

46. *Enuma Elish*, translated by Benjamin R. Foster (COS 1:111:400).

47. Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (2nd ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) 76.

The effect of the satire or polemic in Gen 11:9 is increased if one accepts that in the biblical tradition YHWH named Babel/Babylon. The narrative artfully and theologically connects the historical name with 'confused' (*b-l-l*), in contrast to a popular Akkadian etymology for Babylon, "gate of (the) god(s)." Issues of narrative credibility and the role of a naming hero also relate to this view. It thus seems preferable to read this naming report with a definite subject (vv. 8–9): "So the LORD scattered them abroad. . . . Therefore *he* called it Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them." The last two phrases in v. 9, the placement of which after the name is not typical of Form II reports, function to reiterate summarily what has already been stated and to provide the name-play in the report.⁴⁸

Observations on This Review of Form II Naming Reports

Table 1 overviews how the subjects in these 21 Form II reports are rendered in the comparative translations employed in this essay. Obviously, there are limitations to observations that can be made on the basis of a few representative translations and because of the ambiguous nature of Hebrew grammar, but a few general points are worth considering. First, the more modern the translation, the more often subjects in Form II reports are translated as indefinite. This appears to represent a conscious trend in translation, reinforced by the fact that the translation of these naming reports in the NIV (1984) matches the renderings in the NPSV—only the reports in Gen 29:34 and 30:6 are read with definite subjects.

Second, in conjunction with the trend just noted, there is more variation between the two older translation examples—the LXX and KJV—in the rendering of subjects as definite or indefinite and between the older translations and the newer ones than between the newer translations themselves.

Third, the fact that less than half of the instances in which the LXX translators read the subject of a report as definite overlap with instances in which the KJV renders the subject of a report as definite suggests that translators have wrestled for a long time with how to understand the subjects in these naming reports. The two instances of rendering a definite subject in the KJV that overlap with definite renderings in the NRSV and NPSV are Gen 29:35 and 30:6—the

⁴⁸ Most commentators, including Fokkelman in his extended literary treatment of Gen 11:1–9 (*Narrative Art in Genesis*, 11–29), say little or nothing about the naming report itself in Gen 11:9, simply assuming the subject of the verb קרא is indefinite.

Table 1. Naming Reports with על-כן קרא
(and Grammatical Variants) in Translation

Source	Definite Subject	Indefinite Subject	Plausibly Definite Subject
LXX	12 (5 overlap with KJV)	9	
KJV	9 (2 overlap with NRSV)	12	
NRSV	3	18	
NJPSV	2	19	
My [†] Reading	3	9	9 (5 overlap with definite subjects in LXX)

two passages in which the subject was rendered as definite in every translation sampled.

Fourth, because different authors, redactors, copyists, and translators worked on various biblical texts in different times and places, we do not have a consistent perspective from which to judge individual approaches to the grammar of naming reports. Thus, these data suggest that what the phrase על-כן קרא was understood to convey as far as definiteness is concerned did not remain the same during the centuries in which biblical books were copied and translated. This is likely true during the time when the biblical books were composed.

Fifth, there is the possibility that the verb קרא in some Form II naming reports was originally intended to be read as a Qal passive. As Waltke and O'Connor have indicated, "The Masoretes recognized Qal only as an active stem, but there is much evidence that Biblical Hebrew also had a passive counterpart. On comparative grounds a Qal passive is easily justified."⁴⁹ Several instances in which the subject of a Form II naming report seems indefinite could be more easily dealt with if the verb was read as a legitimate passive. The traditional Masoretic vocalization of קרא in Form II naming reports does not even hint at this possibility.

Sixth, it is not clear what, if anything, should be made of the fact that the only two Form II naming reports rendered with definite subjects in the NJPSV (two of the three so rendered in the NRSV) are instances of the naming of people,

49. Waltke and O'Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 373–74 (§22.6a). The root *q-r-ʿ* is mentioned in n. 30 but not in the context of Form II reports, which are not addressed in the discussion of Qal passive.

not places (Gen 29:35 for Judah, 30:6 for Dan). These are consistently read as definite because of the feminine grammatical forms. If the Genesis narrative reported that Jacob had named these sons instead of Leah and Rachel, and the verbs were 3ms, one wonders if any modern translators would read these two passages as definite! These two Form II reports in which people are named are not exceptional but rather representative of how other Form II naming reports could be translated.

Concluding Remarks

The data clearly support the claim made above that the current trend in English translations is to render most Form II naming reports with an indefinite subject. This approach, however, gives too little consideration to Form II reports in which a definite subject can plausibly be read (without grammatical contortions) and to literary issues such as narrative logic, descriptive information, rhetorical credibility, and the significance of the namer-hero in the narrative.

It seems preferable to reverse the current approach. Rather than translate the subjects of these naming reports as indefinite unless the grammar requires otherwise, it is better to judiciously render the subjects as definite in reports in which a reading of this sort is at least plausible. After all, fewer than half of the Form II biblical naming reports analyzed above *require* an indefinite rendering. Granted, this approach will result in differences between translations; however, this has historically been the case (see the table 1).

I disagree with Long and others who claim that Form II reports rarely narrate the actual act of naming.⁵⁰ Many, if not most, of these reports can and should be read as if they do just this. Seen this way, Form II reports are not necessarily so functionally different from Form I reports, as Long and others have contended.

Not everyone will accept the plausibility of reading certain of these naming reports with a definite subject, in part because there do not appear to be any universally recognized and accepted criteria for evaluating whether the implied subjects of these reports should be read as definite or indefinite. Hebrew grammar is not decisive, nor is the form of the report itself an entirely reliable guide. It seems inevitable that there will always be questions and differences of opinion about these biblical naming reports.

The case for rendering the subject of the naming report in Gen 11:9 as definite is not overwhelming (note the traditional indefinite rendering), but doing so enhances appreciation for the aims of the narrator, for the significant

⁵⁰ Long, *Etiological Narrative*, 6.

credibility of the namer-hero in this naming report, for an increased degree of polemic against the views of non-Israelites and the supposed power of their gods and traditions, and for the possibility of a correlation between the naming tradition of Babel/Babylon in the literatures of two different cultures. Whatever general interpretive approach one takes to Gen 11:9 and the other naming reports with על-כן קרא, no one can satisfactorily answer all of the questions about them. However, it seems to be time to reconsider the narrative value of these biblical naming reports and to move toward a more balanced approach to rendering them.