

# Diachronic Diversity in Classical Biblical Hebrew

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## 7. 1CPL נָחֵנוּ VERSUS אֲנַחְנוּ

There are three variants of the 1CPL independent subject pronoun in BH. The standard form, with some 120 occurrences, is אֲנַחְנוּ (pausal אֲנַחְנוּ). The RH-like form אֲנִי comes as the *ketiv* form (read according to the *qere* as standard אֲנַחְנוּ) in Jer. 42.6 (see Hornkohl 2014a, 125–28, for recent discussion and references). The form נָחֵנוּ (pausal נָחֵנוּ) comes just five times in BH (Gen. 42.11; Exod. 16.7, 8; Num. 32.32; Lam. 3.42<sup>1</sup>).

### 1.0. Distribution Outside Tiberian Biblical Hebrew

Standard BH אֲנַחְנוּ is also typical of the BDSS, the NBDSS, and SH; it is a minority form in RH, where it is used in the more formal registers of prayers and blessings, as well as in quotations or imitation of the Bible. The form אֲנִי dominates in RH and is also known from QH (approximately 20 ×). The form נָחֵנוּ is found in Iron Age inscriptional Hebrew (Lachish 4.10–11) and possibly once in a highly fragmentary NBDSS text (2Q29 f1.2).

Beyond Hebrew, forms like אֲנַחְנוּ are found in Aramaic, Phoenician, and Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian; forms like נָחֵנוּ are found in Arabic, Ethiopic, and Early and Middle Akkadian (Elitzur 2018a, 94).

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<sup>1</sup> The apparent case in 2 Sam. 17.12 is wrongly included in some reference works, e.g., the Groves-Wheeler (1991–2016) electronic database. In view of the syntax, BDB (59b) correctly identifies the relevant form in the expression וְנִהְיֶה עָלָיו as a *weqatal* in the sense ‘we will descend upon him’ (see also Elitzur 2018a, 94, fn. 27).

## 2.0. Typology

The RH form  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  is generally held to be a secondary, inner-Hebrew, development, based either on 1CS  $\text{נָחֵי}$  (e.g., Sáenz-Badillos 1993, 184; Fernández 1997, 18; Blau 2010, §4.2.2.6.1; see Hornkohl 2014a, 125. fns 58, 60 for further references) or the 1CPL object/possessive suffix (GKC §32d). There is debate among scholars as to the typological priority of  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  versus  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$ . According to one approach,  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  is the primitive form, the initial *ʾalef* having been added on the basis of analogy to the 1CS pronouns  $\text{נָחֵי}$  and  $\text{נָחֵי}$  (e.g., JM §39a Blau 2010, §4.2.2.6.1; see Hornkohl 2014a, 125. fn. 53, and Elitzur 2018a, 94, for further references). This is in agreement with Hetzron's (1976) principle of archaic heterogeneity. Others (e.g., Harris 1939, 78–79; Kutscher 1982, §42) think the form beginning with *ʾalef* the earlier of the two, the loss of the initial glottal stop attributable to that consonant's weakness.

## 3.0. Interpreting the Data

The distributional evidence and typological considerations arguably point to  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  as an archaic form. Table 1 (facing page) presents the distribution of  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  and  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  within the principal sections in Tiberian BH. As evidence of the antiquity of the form without *ʾalef*, JM (§39a) notes that  $\text{נָחֵנוּ}$  appears four times in the Pentateuch. Its documentation in Iron Age Hebrew epigraphy is also significant. Conversely, its appearance in TBH Lamentations should not be considered diachronically diagnostic, because the form without *ʾalef* was needed there for purposes of the acrostic.

Table 1: Incidence of נָחֵנוּ and אֲנַחֵנוּ within the principal sections in Tiberian BH

	נָחֵנוּ	אֲנַחֵנוּ
<b>Torah</b>	4	28
<b>Former Prophets</b>	0	32
<b>Latter Prophets</b>	0	19
<b>Non-LBH Writings</b>	1	11
<b>LBH</b>	0	31

Regarding the situation in the Pentateuch—standard אֲנַחֵנוּ dominates. Elitzur (2018a, 94) observes that נָחֵנוּ is restricted in the Torah to quoted speech within narrative, though it is important to note that even in such quotations, standard אֲנַחֵנוּ is more common. Even if נָחֵנוּ is typologically more ancient than אֲנַחֵנוּ, in terms of ancient Hebrew diachrony, both forms appear to have been available for usage in CBH. Further, linguistic development was such that, according to the historical snapshot offered by CBH texts, it is clear that ostensibly secondary אֲנַחֵנוּ had become established as the standard form. The form נָחֵנוּ can in no way be classified as characteristic of any form of CBH, whether of the Torah or of the relevant Prophets and Writings. The most that can be said is that the CBH of the Tiberian Torah uniquely preserves the typologically archaic form נָחֵנוּ, with no trace of it in the rest of CBH or, for that matter, in the combined written-reading Samaritan tradition of the BH of the Torah, where all forms of the 1CPL independent subject pronoun are standard אַנְחֵנוּ *ānānnu*.

As in the case of additional features discussed in this volume, one must question the historical depth of the distinction between the Tiberian Torah and the rest of Tiberian CBH. Is the

restriction of the employment of typologically archaic נָחֻ in the Torah against its absence in the rest of CBH authentic, or might נָחֻ have once occurred elsewhere in CBH, but have been levelled in compositional and/or transmissional processes? The textual evidence is insufficient to point decisively one way or the other.<sup>2</sup>

The source critical situation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Incidence of נָחֻ and אֶנְחֻ according to purported Pentateuchal sources (per Friedman 1989, 246–55)<sup>3</sup>

	נָחֻ	אֶנְחֻ
<b>J</b>	1	17
<b>E</b>	0	3
<b>P</b>	3	3
<b>Dtr<sup>1</sup></b>	0	4
<b>Other</b>	0	1

Assuming the correctness of the theory that נָחֻ is typologically and diachronically prior to אֶנְחֻ, it is interesting that all purported Pentateuchal sources exhibit usage of standard אֶנְחֻ, that use of נָחֻ is shared by both J and P, and that P, of all sources, exhibits the usage profile most consistent with preservation of archaic usage.

<sup>2</sup> Elitzur (2018a, 93–94) discusses two further distinctive Pentateuchal forms: הָאֵלֶּה for הָאֵלֶּה ‘these’ and כֶּבֶּשׂ for כֶּבֶּשׂ ‘sheep’. As these have no clear typological priority vis-à-vis their standard alternants, however, they are merely noted here.

<sup>3</sup> נָחֻ—Gen. 42.11 (J); Exod. 16.7 (P), 8 (P); Num. 32.32 (P); אֶנְחֻ—Gen. 13.8 (J); 19.13 (J); 29.4 (J); 37.7 (J); 42.11 (J), 13 (J), 21 (E), 31, (J), 32 (J); 43.8 (J), 18 (E); 44.9 (J), 16 (J); 46.34 (J); 47.3 (J), 19 (J), 19 (J); Exod. 10.26 (E); Num. 9.7 (P); 10.29 (J); 20.4 (P), 16 (J); 32.17 (P); Deut. 1.28 (Dtr<sup>1</sup>), 41 (Dtr<sup>1</sup>); 5.3 (Dtr<sup>1</sup>), 25 (Dtr<sup>1</sup>); 12.8 (Other).