

A Reconsideration of “Double-Duty” Prepositions in Biblical Poetry

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1.0 Introduction

Mitchell Dahood coined the phrase “double-duty preposition” to refer to a preposition in one line which should be understood in a parallel line.¹ For example, in (1), Dahood understood the preposition כּ to serve a double-duty function before the noun phrase of the second line:²

(1) Ps. 65:5³

Dahood: May we be fully imbued with the beauty of your house,
[*with*] the holiness of your temple.

נְשַׁכְעָה בְּטוֹב בֵּיתְךָ
קֹדֶשׁ הַיְכָלְךָ

In cases like this one, however, it is possible to understand the two noun phrases (“the beauty of your house,” “the holiness of your temple”) as appositional—“the beauty of your house, (namely), your holy temple.” By this analysis, there is no “double-duty” preposition, but only a single preposition governing two appositional noun phrases.

Other purported instances of “double-duty” prepositions are less easily resolved and some have exegetical ramifications. For example, Ps. 106:16 in (2) has been understood by O’Connor to contain an elided preposition in addition to the elided verb:⁴

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1. Although the term “double-duty” originated with Dahood (*Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology*, *Bib.Or.* 17 [Rome, 1967], §13.44a), a similar approach to ellipsis was followed by some medieval Hebrew grammarians who described elliptical constructions in terms of one item “standing for” or “serving for” an item that is deleted. See, e.g., W. Chomsky, *David Kimhi’s Hebrew Grammar* (New York, 1952), 356–58; and G. Khan, *The Early Karaite Tradition of Hebrew Grammatical Thought* (Leiden, 2000), 128–31.

2. M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 50–100, AB* (Garden City, 1968), 111; and *Psalms III: 101–150, AB* (Garden City, 1970), 436.

3. In the English translations of the examples, an underlined word represents the antecedent of the elided constituent. A word in italics enclosed with square brackets represents the elided constituent.

4. M. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, 1980), 281, 405.

(2) Ps. 106:16

O'Connor's analysis: They vexed Moses in the camp וַיִּקְנְאוּ לְמֹשֶׁה בַּמַּחֲנֶה
and [they vexed] Aaron [in] YHWH's shrine. וְלֵאֲהֲרֹן קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה:
Compare: They vexed Moses in the camp,
and [they vexed] Aaron, the holy one of the LORD.

English translations recognize the elided verb, but do not understand the preposition כ in serving “double-duty” in the second line. The NRSV, for example, translates: “They were jealous of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD” (see also NJPS).⁵ Whether or not the preposition should be understood as serving “double-duty” affects the interpretation of “the holy one of the LORD” as referring either to sacred space or to a sacred functionary.⁶

In this article, I preliminarily reconsider the question of “double-duty” prepositions in biblical poetry. My goal is to ascertain the basic syntactic contexts within which this phenomenon occurs and the range of constructions that result. However, I will reshape the discussion in two ways in order to follow modern linguistic practice. First, instead of focusing on the item that is retained in an elliptical structure, I will describe the item that is deleted. That is, rather than describing the preposition כ in the *first* line of (2) as serving “double-duty,” I will consider whether the preposition has been deleted (or, elided) from the *second* line. Second, a consideration of the ellipsis of prepositions must occur within a broader discussion of the ellipsis of prepositional phrases. The ellipsis of prepositional phrases is more common and less problematic than is the ellipsis of bare prepositions.

2.0 Syntactic preliminaries

As background to the following discussion, it is important to discuss the syntactic facts about prepositions and about ellipsis.

2.1 Prepositions and clausal syntax

A consideration of prepositional ellipsis is complicated by two sets of facts about prepositions: general facts concerning the multi-functional nature of prepositions, and specific facts about prepositions in Hebrew.

In general, prepositional phrases may bear one of two syntactic relationships within the sentence—either as an argument of the predication (typically the patient or recipient of the action of a transitive verb) and thus an obligatory constituent, *or* as an adjunct, an optional constituent, typically indicating peripheral information concerning the time, location, or circumstances of the predication. Ellipsis involving a

5. Interestingly, in this verse Dahood concurs with the majority opinion and does not understand the preposition to serve double-duty. He translates: “They envied Moses in the camp, / and Aaron the holy one of Yahweh” (Dahood, *Psalms III*, 65).

6. Semantically, either choice is possible. In Deut. 23:15, the camp is described as קדוש. In Lev. 21:7–8 and Num. 16:5, 7, priests are described as קדוש. In the context of the narrative that is related in Ps. 106 (i.e., Num. 16), only the priests are described as קדוש and no mention is made of the camp as קדוש. Furthermore, the issue in dispute in Num. 16 concerns who is קדוש.

prepositional phrase that is an argument of the predication will result in fragmentation of the surface syntax; ellipsis involving an adjunct by definition will not.

The facts about prepositional phrases in Biblical Hebrew provide additional difficulties. Although some prepositions (especially ל and ב) *may* introduce the arguments of predications, there is considerable variation in this respect. Some lexical verbs exhibit variation in the representation of, for example, the object of the verb with a prepositional phrase or not.⁷ In (3), for example, both lines have the same verb, but the object of the verb is represented with a prepositional phrase in the first line, and with a noun phrase in the second:

(3) Ps. 21:9

Your hand will find (ל) all your enemies;
your right hand will find those who hate you.

תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לְכָל-אֹיְבֶיךָ
יְמִינְךָ תִּמְצָא שֹׂנְאֶיךָ

Should we understand the preposition ל to be elided from the second line? Or should we say that the two lines exploit the linguistic variation concerning the ways in which the object of מִצָּא can be presented?⁸

The same problem is present with prepositions that introduce optional constituents, since a simple noun phrase may function as a so-called “adverbial accusative” within the clause, as illustrated in (4):

(4) Ps. 68:7

He (God) leads out prisoners into (ב) prosperity,
but the rebellious live [*in?*] a parched land.

מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בְּכוֹשְׁרוֹת
אֶף טֹרְדִים שְׁכֵנִי צְחִיחָה

The verb in the second line, שִׁכְנוּ, is followed by a noun phrase—should we understand the preposition ב from the previous line to be elided here? Although the verb שָׁכַן is often followed by a prepositional phrase headed with ב to indicate location, a noun phrase may serve the same function (e.g., Job 15:28).

These facts about prepositions, both generally and specifically for Hebrew, highlight the difficult task of determining whether ellipsis has occurred.

2.2 Ellipsis in Biblical Hebrew

In a non-linguistic sense, “ellipsis” is sometimes used to describe utterances that are *contextually* incomplete. In the following discussion, however, I will use the term “ellipsis” in the linguistic sense to refer to constructions that are *grammatically* incomplete, that is, instances in which the sentence syntax is fragmented.⁹ Ellipsis poses

7. See the discussions in G. H. Ewald, *Syntax of the Hebrew Language of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh, 1891), 43–64; B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, 1990), 221–23; and P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome, 1993), 441–54, 482–85.

8. The object of מִצָּא may consist of a simple noun phrase (Gen. 2:20) or the object may be introduced with אִת (1 Sam. 20:21), and less frequently with ל (Isa. 10:10), or ב (2 Kgs. 9:35).

9. For the distinction between grammatically incomplete and contextually incomplete sentences, see J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1971), 174–75; and M. A. K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English* (London, 1976), 42–43.

a particularly interesting linguistic problem: how are speakers and hearers (or, writers and readers) able “to represent and interpret linguistic objects which, at least on the surface, are not there.”¹⁰

Ellipsis is an important structural feature of biblical poetry and has been studied by a number of scholars.¹¹ Because I view ellipsis as a syntactical process that fragments the surface syntax, I exclude a number of situations that have been broadly considered “elliptical” by some biblical scholars.¹² Among these syntactic contexts are the following: (1) bicola in which the second line is appositional to the final constituent of the first line (e.g., “the remnant of Israel” is appositional to “your people” in Jer. 31:7); (2) optional constituents that appear in one line but are absent from a parallel line (e.g., the prepositional adjunct “with joy” in Ps. 100:2);¹³ and (3) a constituent that heads an embedded coordinate structure is not elided before the second conjunct (e.g., the interrogative “why” in Isa. 50:2).¹⁴ Although the poetic parallelism in each of these situations may require a semantic reading of the bicolon in which constituents from one line are understood in the other, none of these situations involves ellipsis in a syntactic sense.¹⁵

The syntactic facts about ellipsis may be summarized briefly in four general principles.¹⁶ First, ellipsis operates on coordinate structures.¹⁷ In Biblical Hebrew poetry, conjoined lines with identical syntax may be coordinated explicitly with the conjunction *waw*, as in (5):

(5) Isa. 37:32

For from Jerusalem will go out a remnant,
and a band of survivors [*will go out*] from Mount Zion.

כִּי מִירוּשָׁלַם תֵּצֵא שְׁאֲרִית
וּפְלִיטָה מִהָר צִיּוֹן

10. S. Lappin and E. Benmamoun, “Introduction,” in *Fragments: Studies in Ellipsis and Gapping* (Oxford, 1999), 3.

11. For previous discussions of ellipsis in biblical poetry, see O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 124–29, 401–407; S. A. Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry* (HSM 20; Missoula, Mont., 1979), 299–312; D. K. Stuart, “A Type of Ellipsis in Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry” (unpublished paper presented to the B.T.I. Old Testament Colloquium, February 10, 1975); E. L. Greenstein, “Two Variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and Their Psycholinguistic Background,” *JANES* 6 (1974), 87–105; idem, “The Study of Deletion (Double-duty) Phenomena in Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew” (unpublished paper presented to the American Oriental Society, 1978); and P. E. Dion, *Hebrew Poetics*, 2nd ed. (Mississauga, 1992), 14–16.

12. C. L. Miller, “A Linguistic Approach to Ellipsis in Biblical Poetry; Or, What to Do When Exegesis of What is There Depends upon What Isn’t,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13 (2003), 251–70; idem, “Ellipsis involving Negation in Biblical Poetry,” in R. L. Troxel, K. G. Friebel, and D. R. Magary, eds., *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Winona Lake, 2005), 37–52; and idem, “Constraints on Ellipsis in Biblical Hebrew,” in *Studies in Comparative Semitic and Afroasiatic Linguistics Presented to Gene B. Gragg* (Chicago, 2007), 165–80.

13. Pace W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, JSOTSupp. 26 (Sheffield, 1984), 303–6.

14. Pace M. Rosenbaum, *Word-order Variation in Isaiah 40–55* (Assen, 1997), 160.

15. On the ways in which parallelism may affect the semantic reading of the line, see N. Fabb, *Linguistics and Literature* (Oxford, 1997), chap. 6 on “Parallelism.”

16. For a more detailed discussion, see Miller, “Constraints on Ellipsis in Biblical Hebrew.”

17. Secondly, ellipsis may operate on comparative structures, with certain additional restrictions. In the following discussion, I omit consideration of these types of ellipsis; see C. L. Miller, “The Syntax of Elliptical Comparative Constructions,” *ZAH* (2007), 136–49.

Ellipsis may also occur when the lines are asyndetically coordinate, that is, they are conjoined without an overt conjunction.¹⁸

The requirement of coordinate structures is important since it precludes ellipsis from a main clause to a subordinate clause. As a result, we do not find examples such as:

(6) Unattested sentence (ellipsis from main clause to subordinate clause):

For from Jerusalem will go out a remnant,
in order that (למען) a band of survivors [*will go out*] from Mount Zion.

Ellipsis, then, is possible between two lines (a bicolon) within biblical verse only when the lines are coordinate. As a result, the syntactic contexts within which ellipsis occurs do not necessarily correspond to poetic lines. Instead, ellipsis may occur within a syntactic context that is less than, or more than, a poetic couplet.

A second requirement of ellipsis is that the two halves of the coordinate sentence must correspond syntactically. Languages differ concerning the nature of this correspondence, and various kinds of ellipsis within a language may differ concerning this requirement as well. In Biblical Hebrew, this requirement usually means that the constituents in the two lines match exactly. For example, in (5), the constituents are identical, although they occur in chiastic order in the two conjuncts: prepositional phrase, verb, subject. It is important to note, however, that ellipsis depends upon a match in the underlying constituent structures, not in the surface syntax, as illustrated in (7):¹⁹

(7) Ps. 78:14

He led them with the cloud by day,
and all night with the light of fire [*he led them*].

וַיִּנְחֵם בְּעָנָן יוֹמָם
וְכָל־הַלַּיְלָה בְּאֹרֶשׁ:

The constituents in the two conjuncts are not identical. However, because the adverb יומם and the noun phrase כל-הלילה are both adverbial modifiers of the verb phrase, ellipsis takes place. This feature of ellipsis will be especially important in the discussion to follow.

Another situation in which ellipsis from non-identical lines occurs will be mentioned briefly. In some instances involving ellipsis, the constituent structures at the level of the clause may match although their internal syntactic structures differ:

(8) Mic. 7:1

There is no grape cluster to eat,
[*there is no*] ripe fig (which) my soul desires.

אֵין־אֶשְׁכּוּל לְאֹכֹל
בְּבוֹרֶה אֲנִתָּה נִפְשִׁי:

18. See the syntactically identical bicola in Ps. 88:12–13. In verse 13, the lines are explicitly coordinated with *waw*; in verse 12, the lines are asyndetic. Each bicolon involves ellipsis of the verb out of syntactically coordinate lines.

19. Other scholars have identified the importance of underlying syntactic structures to parallel lines; see E. L. Greenstein, "How does Parallelism Mean?" in *A Sense of Text: The Art of Language in the Study of Biblical Literature*, *JQR Supp.* (Winona Lake, 1983), 41–70; and A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, 1985).

The existential predicate אֵין has been elided from the beginning of the second conjunct. The two lines match only at the highest syntactic level; they differ in that the subject in the first line (אֲשָׁכּוּל) is modified by an infinitival clause, whereas the subject in the second line (בְּכֹרֶה) is modified by an unmarked relative clause.

A third requirement of ellipsis is that the item that is present and the item that is deleted must be lexically identical. When ellipsis involves prepositions, this requirement means that the specific preposition must be identical in both lines. For example, in (3), it is impossible to posit that אֵת has been elided before שְׁנַאִיךְ, even though in isolation the object of מִצָּא could be governed with אֵת.

A final feature of ellipsis involves the direction of ellipsis. All of the Hebrew examples we have looked at thus far involve forwards ellipsis, that is, an item is present in the first line and is deleted from the second line. The opposite situation—when deletion occurs in the first line—is known as backwards ellipsis.²⁰ Backwards ellipsis in Hebrew is highly constrained and is possible only from final position in the clause, as in (9):

(9) Ps. 20:8

These in chariotry [will trust],
and these in horses [will trust],

but we in the name of the LORD our God will trust.²¹

אֵלֶּה בְּרֶכֶב
וְאֵלֶּה בְּסוּסִים
וְאֶנְחֵנוּ | בְּשֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר:

The verb is in final position in the third conjunct and has gapped backwards into the first and second conjuncts. This observation about backwards ellipsis occurring only from final position in the conjunct corresponds to what we know about ellipsis cross-linguistically.²²

With this introduction, we are ready to examine the ways in which prepositions and prepositional phrases may be elided in biblical poetry.

20. Instead of backwards ellipsis, Andersen refers to an item that does “retroactive double-duty”; see F. I. Andersen, “What Biblical Scholars Might Learn from Emily Dickinson,” in J. Davies, G. Harvey, and W. G. E. Watson, eds., *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F. A. Sawyer*, JSOTSupp. 195 (Sheffield, 1995), 69–70.

21. One of the problems in translating this verse is finding an English verb that conveys the Hiphil of זָכַר and is appropriate with objects involving military equipment (“chariotry,” “horses”) as well as “the name of the LORD our God.”

22. For example, in Japanese the verb is always clause-final and only the backwards ellipsis of verbs occurs (see R. van Oirouw, *The Syntax of Coordination* [London, 1987], 134). Other languages with verb-final order and backwards ellipsis include Basque (see J. D. McCawley, *The Syntactic Phenomena of English*, 2nd ed. [Chicago, 1998], 286), and Marathi (see R. V. Pandharipande, *Marathi* [London, 1997], 176). In some languages, either forwards or backwards ellipsis is possible. In Lezgian (a language of the northeastern Caucasus), the verb is in final position, but ellipsis may be either forwards or backwards (see M. Haspelmath, *A Grammar of Lezgian* [Berlin, 1993], 338–39). In Russian, the position of the verb in the sentence is variable. Forwards ellipsis of the verb is possible regardless of the position of the verb in the clause, but backwards ellipsis of the verb occurs only when the verb is in final position in the clause (van Oirouw, *The Syntax of Coordination*, 122.) Other languages which are like Russian in this respect include German (see M. Haspelmath, “Coordination,” in Timothy Shopen, ed., *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, 2nd ed. [Cambridge, 2007]), Turkish (see J. Kornfilt, “Directionality of Identical Verb Deletion in Turkish Coordination,” *Jorge Hankamer Webfest* [<http://ling.ucsc.edu/Jorge/kornfilt.html>]), and Ugaritic (see C. L. Miller, “Patterns of Verbal Ellipsis in Ugaritic,” *UF* 31 [1999–2000], 333–72).

3.0 Varieties of prepositional ellipsis

3.1 Ellipsis involving prepositional phrases

I will begin with ellipsis involving a prepositional phrase that functions as an argument of the verb. A clear example of this phenomenon is found in (10), where the same verb is found in both lines:

(10) Ps. 22:5

In you our fathers trusted,
[in you] they trusted and you delivered them.

בְּךָ בָּטְחוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
בָּטְחוּ וַתַּפִּילָם

The prepositional phrase בְּךָ is the object of the verb. It has been deleted from initial position in the second line; the direction of ellipsis is forwards, as expected.²³ Note that the clause in the first line corresponds syntactically to the first clause of the second line, thus meeting the requirements for ellipsis to take place.

When the verbs of the two lines are not identical, it is important to assess whether both verbs have the same argument structure. Consider (11):

(11) Ps. 2:4

The one who sits in the heavens will mock [*them*];
the Lord will ridicule them.

יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחָק
אֲדֹנָי יִלְעֹג-לָמוֹ:

The verb שָׁחַק ordinarily has an object introduced with the preposition ל.²⁴ It is quite likely, then, that the prepositional phrase from the second line should be understood as elided backwards to the first line,²⁵ although the verse is not usually translated in this way.²⁶

A prepositional phrase that is an argument of a verbless clause may also be deleted across parallel lines whose syntactic structure is identical, as in (12):²⁷

(12) Ps. 24:1

To the LORD (belongs) the earth and its fullness,
[to the LORD] (belongs) the world and those who live in it.

לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלֹאָתָהּ
תִּבְלֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּהּ:

The prepositional phrase serves as the predicate of the verbless clause. It has been elided forwards from initial position.²⁸ The result is a surface structure that could be

23. Briggs acknowledges that the prepositional phrase belongs before the verb in the second line. However, he believes that its absence is the result of textual corruption, rather than ellipsis; C. A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ICC (New York, 1906–1907), 1.202.

24. For the object of שָׁחַק marked by ל, see Pss. 37:13 and 59:9 (in parallel with לַעֲנֵי, as in Ps 2:4).

25. Briggs believes that לָמוֹ followed the verb in the first line in the original text (Briggs, *Psalms*, 1.20).

26. Ps. 50:7 is similar, though less certain. The verb דָּבַר may take an object marked with ב (see verse 20). In this case, it is possible that the poet has produced a formally ambiguous situation. On first reading, the verb דָּבַר does not seem to need an object; on second reading, it is clear that the prepositional phrase from the following line could be understood as representing the object of דָּבַר—the speaking then takes on a negative nuance.

27. For additional examples, see Pss. 50:10; 95:5; 114:5–6 (2x).

28. There are no examples in the Psalms of backwards ellipsis of obligatory prepositional phrases in verbless clauses.

construed as two roughly appositional noun phrases (“the earth and its fullness” juxtaposed with “the world and those who live in it”).²⁹

When the prepositional phrase is not obligatory to the clause, it is impossible to know whether ellipsis has occurred, as in (13):

(13) Ps. 132:8

Rise, O LORD, to your resting place,

[rise,] you and your mighty ark, [to your resting place(?)].

קוּמָה יְהוָה לְמִנוּחָךְ
אַתָּה וְאַרְוֶיךָ עֲזָרְךָ:

The verb has certainly been elided from the second line. It is possible that the optional prepositional phrase has also. In (14), the optional prepositional phrase occurs in final position in the second line:

(14) Ps. 84:4

Even the sparrow has found a house [for itself(?)]

and the swallow [has found] a nest for itself.

גַּם-צִפּוֹר | מְצָאָהּ בֵּית
וְדִרְוֹר | קֵן לָהּ

The verb from the first line has been deleted in the second line. The prepositional phrase לָהּ in the second line could be understood as elided backwards from final position; but because the prepositional phrase is not obligatory to the syntax of the first line, it is impossible to be certain.

So far, we have seen that ellipsis of prepositional phrases follows the same syntactic patterns that are present for other clausal constituents—ellipsis requires coordinate structures whose underlying syntax matches. Forwards ellipsis may occur from any position within the clause; backwards ellipsis requires that the constituent be on the final periphery of the clause. When a prepositional phrase is optional, the surface structure is not fragmented—ellipsis *may* be posited in lines which exhibit the requisite syntactic features.

3.2 Ellipsis of bare prepositions

We turn now to the ellipsis of a bare preposition, which differs significantly from that of a prepositional phrase, as a result of syntactic differences between prepositions and prepositional phrases.³⁰ Most importantly, a preposition serves as the head of a *phrasal* constituent, namely, a prepositional phrase. Prepositional phrases are, in turn, constituents at the level of the clause; prepositions are not. As a result, we can expect that a preposition will not elide from coordinated clauses in the same way that prepositional phrases elide. However, because prepositions are phrase-level constituents, ellipsis at the phrasal level is quite possible, as illustrated in (15):

(15) Ps. 135:6

Everything which the LORD desires
he does in heaven and in earth
in the seas and [*in*] all the deeps.

כָּל אֲשֶׁר-חָפֵץ יְהוָה
עָשָׂה בַשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ
בַּיָּמִים וּכְל-תְּהוֹמוֹת:

29. Other examples include: Pss. 50:10; 95:5; 114:5–6; and 120:5.

30. For discussions in the reference grammars, see GKC §119hh; Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 222–23; Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 484; and R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 1976), 44.

In this example, there are three prepositional phrases—*בשמים*, *בארץ*, and *בימים* וכל-תהומות. In the final prepositional phrase, the preposition *ב* governs two coordinate noun phrases. Linguists differ in how they explain the underlying structure of such phrases, but most would consider ellipsis to have occurred on the phrasal level—underlyingly, there were two prepositional phrases *בימים* and *בכל-תהומות*.³¹ Deletion occurs forwards from initial position. The resulting structure is a prepositional phrase headed by a single preposition, which has a coordinate noun phrase as its complement.³²

Since prepositions in Hebrew cannot follow the noun phrase that they govern (they are, after all, *prepositions* and not *postpositions*), a bare preposition can never occur at the final periphery of the phrase, a position that is a requirement for backwards ellipsis. As a result ellipsis of a preposition out of underlying, coordinate prepositional phrases is always forwards—backwards ellipsis, resulting in (the ungrammatical) *ימים ובכל-תהומות*, is not possible.

In poetry, the noun phrases governed by a preposition may be distributed over more than one poetic line—most putative examples of bare preposition ellipsis can be accounted for by this fact.³³ To return to Dahood’s example in (1), the preposition *ב* is followed by two appositional noun phrases. Ellipsis of a preposition has occurred at the level of the phrase, not at the level of the clause.³⁴

Ellipsis of a preposition at the clause level is very difficult to motivate from a linguistic point of view, because a preposition is not a clausal constituent. There are, however, a handful of examples which cannot be described in any other way. They can be divided into three syntactic configurations.

In the first configuration, a preposition that is the head of a prepositional predicate elides forwards from the initial periphery of the clause, as in (16):

(16) Isa. 15:8

As far as Eglaim (is) her cry,
and [as far as] Beer Elim (is) her cry.

עַד־אֶגְלַיִם יִלְלָתָהּ
וּבְאֶרְ אֵילִים יִלְלָתָהּ:

In this example, two verbless clauses are conjoined.³⁵ The prepositional phrase functions as the predicate of each clause and is necessary for a well-formed predication. The head of the prepositional phrase, the bare preposition *עַד*, has been deleted from the second clausal conjunct.

In the second syntactic configuration, the verb *היה* or a nominal predicate is deleted from the initial periphery of the clause. The preposition that immediately follows is also deleted. In (17), the finite verb *היה* is deleted along with the preposition that introduces the argument of the verb.

31. See, e.g., C. Wilder, “Some Properties of Ellipsis in Coordination,” in A. Alexiadou and T. A. Hall, eds., *Studies on Universal Grammar and Typological Variation* (Amsterdam, 1997), 59–107.

32. Other linguists would argue that the prepositional head, namely *ב*, is shared by the coordinate noun phrases; see, e.g., V. I. Lin, *Coordination and Sharing at the Interfaces* (Ph.D. diss., MIT, 2002). The difference in analysis is not significant to the argument here.

33. Waltke and O’Connor refer to this construction as “preposition override” (Waltke and O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 222–23); see also O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 310–11.

34. Similarly, *אֵל* governs two noun phrases in Ps. 136:9.

35. For a similar example, involving verbless clauses with prepositional phrases as predicates, see Job 12:12 and 15:3.

(17) Isa. 42:22

They have become plunder and no one rescues,
[*they have become*] spoil and no one says, “Restore!”

הָיָו לְבוֹ וְאֵין מַצִּיל
מִשְׁסָּה וְאֵין־אֹמֵר הֶשֶׁב:

The verb is in initial position in the clause and the preposition immediately follows.³⁶ Ellipsis seems to be possible because the verb plus preposition have become what linguists call a verbal compound.³⁷ Alternatively, as suggested already by Gesenius, the syntax is a result of textual corruptions—an original preposition ל dropped out because the preceding word (מציל) ends in ל.³⁸

The predicate may be a nominal predicate, as in (18):

(18) Job 34:10

Far be it from El (to do) wickedness
and [*far be it from*] Shaddai (to do) wrong.

חַלְלָה לְאֵל מְרָשָׁע
וְשַׁדַּי מַעֲרָל:

The expression חַלְלָה ל has been deleted from the second conjunct.

In the third configuration, the preposition that is deleted is not immediately adjacent to the deleted verb. The surface structure constituents match precisely and the verb is one which has more than one prepositional phrase associated with it. The clearest examples are those in which the verb is הִיָּה, as in (19):

(19) Isa. 28:5–6 (arranged by sentences)

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִיָּה יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לְעֹטֶרֶת צָכִי וְלַצִּפִּירִת תְּפָאֶרֶה לְשָׂאֵר עַמּוֹ:
וְלִרְיוֹחַ מִשְׁפָּט לְיוֹשֵׁב עַל־הַמִּשְׁפָּט
וְלִגְבוּרָה מִשִּׁיבֵי מִלְחָמָה שֹׁעֲרָה:

In that day, the LORD of hosts will be (ל) a crown of beauty and (ל) a diadem of glory (ל)
for the remnant of his people,
and [*the LORD of hosts will be*] (ל) a spirit of justice (ל) for the one who sits in judgment,
and [*the LORD of hosts will be*] (ל) strength [*for*] those who turn back battle at the gate.

We can summarize by saying that bare preposition ellipsis in the clause is always forwards, never backwards, because a preposition can never appear in final position in a clause. While extremely rare, ellipsis of the preposition is possible from coordinated verbless clauses when the preposition occurs in initial position in the first conjunct. It is possible when הִיָּה or a nominal predicate is deleted from initial position and the preposition immediately follows the verb. And finally, it is possible when הִיָּה is deleted from initial position, and the preposition is deleted from a later position. It is interesting to note that these instances of bare preposition ellipsis involve sentences with verbless predications or predications with הִיָּה. When ellipsis involves the head of a prepositional predicate, the resulting fragmentation of the surface syntax

36. Isa. 60:19 is similar.

37. Verbal compounds comprise a verb plus preposition in which the compound as a whole has a distinctive meaning. An example is the English verbal compound *look up*, as in the sentence *She looked up the word*. Compare the sentence *She looked up the elevator shaft*, in which the verb *look* is followed by the prepositional phrase *up the elevator shaft*. When a preposition is part of a verbal compound, it need not precede the object of the verb. Compare *She looked the word up* with the ungrammatical sentence **She looked the elevator shaft up*. (I am grateful to Robert D. Holmstedt for drawing my attention to these examples.)

38. GKC §119hh.

signals that ellipsis has occurred, as in (16). Similarly, when ellipsis involves the head of a prepositional phrase in a sentence predicated with *היה*, the hearer must restore the preposition in order to understand the relationship of the surface noun phrase to the existential verb, either as an argument of the predication, as in (17), or as an optional adjunct to the predication, as in (19).

With these generalizations in mind, we can return to some of our problematic examples. In (2) [Ps. 106:16], ellipsis of the bare preposition has not occurred. Instead, two syntactic interpretations are possible: either the noun phrase *קדוש יהוה* is appositional to *אֶהְרֶךְ*, or *קדוש יהוה* is an adverbial accusative. In (3) [Ps. 21:9], we should not consider that bare ellipsis of the preposition *ל* has occurred, but rather that the poet has exploited the linguistic variation concerning the syntactic marking of the object of *מִצָּא* across parallel lines. In (4), Ps. 68:7, there is no ellipsis of the bare preposition, but an adverbial accusative in the second line.

We can now consider a final putative example of ellipsis in the light of these general principles:

(20) Ps. 114:8

the one who turns the rock (into) a pool of water,
[the one who turns] flint into a spring of water.

הֶהֱפִי הַצּוּר אֲגַם־מַיִם
חֲלָמִישׁ לְמַעֲיֵנו־מַיִם

In this example, we can see clearly that the two conjuncts must have identical underlying syntactic structure, because forwards deletion of the verb *הֶהֱפִי* has occurred. The question is: has the preposition *ל* also been deleted backwards? The answer is no for two reasons. First, it would be highly anomalous for a preposition, which is never in final position within its constituent, to delete backwards. Second, it is not necessary to see any fragmentation of the sentence structure in the first line. The verb *הֶפֶךְ* may take two objects—a primary object and a secondary object.³⁹ The secondary object may be indicated by a prepositional phrase headed by *ל* (as in the second line)⁴⁰ or an accusative noun phrase (as in Lev. 13:10, 25).⁴¹ In the underlying syntactic structure, the two clauses match precisely.⁴² Ellipsis of the verb has occurred; backwards ellipsis of a bare preposition has not.

4.0 Conclusions

The ellipsis of prepositional phrases follows the same patterns of ellipsis of clausal constituents that are known elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew. The ellipsis of prepositions,

39. See the discussion in Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 174–77 (on two accusative noun phrases); 209 (on the analogous prepositional phrase marking the secondary object).

40. In the examples in Amos 5:7, 6:12, 8:10, the secondary object in both lines takes the preposition.

41. To the examples in Lev. 13:10, 25, compare vv. 16, 17 with the Niphal form of the verb, in which the preposition is found, presumably because the Niphal allows only one argument to be associated with it. This evidence and a similar argument were adduced in Greenstein, “The Study of Deletion (Double-Duty) Phenomena.”

42. Similarly, in Ps. 105:10 (//1 Chr. 16:17), the bicolon pairs two syntactic variations—*הַעֲמִיד* + object + *ל* prepositional phrase and *הַעֲמִיד* + object + adverbial accusative (the prepositional phrases “to Jacob”/“to Israel” indicate the recipients of the verbal action and are not arguments of the verb). No bare preposition ellipsis has occurred.

by contrast, is more highly constrained simply because prepositions are not clausal constituents, but rather phrasal constituents.

Biblical scholars are correct in understanding that the two halves of a bicolon should be read together. However, in many cases, the juxtaposition of two lines with similar, but not identical, surface structures has influenced their judgment concerning the ellipsis of bare prepositions. An examination of the question from a linguistic point of view provides a principled means to determine where ellipsis can plausibly be considered to have occurred, and where it has not.