

wrgarr@religion.ucsb.edu

## ***'a*bāl IN BIBLICAL HEBREW**

W. Randall Garr  
University of California, Santa Barbara

The term *'a*bāl appears eleven times in Biblical Hebrew. It always heads a declarative sentence and, except for two examples, occurs in reported speech. Conventionally, its meaning splits according to the linguistic period in which a particular token is attested: in earlier texts, *'a*bāl is an asseverative ('verily, of a truth' [BDB]); in late texts, it is an adversative ('howbeit, but' [BDB]). Kilwing further argues that *'a*bāl can serve a responsive function, especially when the ensuing speech has a corrective force.

This paper will expand upon Kilwing's argument and will show that, regardless of historical period, Biblical Hebrew *'a*bāl is a discourse marker that serves three roles. First, it serves an organizational role. Occurring precisely at moments when strict discourse expectations are upset, *'a*bāl signals that the following discourse will nonetheless be contextually coherent. Second, it serves an informational role. *'a*bāl introduces assertions. Third, it serves a pragmatic role. *'a*bāl is cooperative and affiliative; it can register sympathy with an addressee, elicit sympathy from an addressee, offer an apologetic concession, or respond sympathetically to (the implications of) a potentially disturbing situation. A rough English translation of *'a*bāl, then, is 'well'.