“Then it was begun to call upon the name of the L ORD” is a literal rendering of the last few words of Gen 4:26, and they are usually read as a statement about the beginnings of YHWH-worship in early human history. That they come at this point and not earlier, in the narrative about Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, is itself cause for reflection; nevertheless it is their relationship to the texts in early Exodus about the revelation of the divine name to Moses (see Exod 3:13–15; 6:2–3) that usually brings them to attention. Whereas Exodus is commonly read to mean that the divine name has been previously unknown to Moses, who must now announce it to the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, Gen 4:26 claims that worship of God, apparently by the name YHWH, began already in the time of Seth and Enosh. This apparent equivocation would be sufficient grounds for expecting divergence within the textual and translational traditions, but probably no less significant in antiquity was the unique form הוחל, the only occurrence in the Hebrew Bible of the verb לֹאַל (“begin”) in the Hophal conjugation. Since this use of the passive denies the sentence a clear and unambiguous subject—Hendel describes the clause as “ungrammatical and semantically obscure in its context”¹—the opportunity is there for differing identifications of those involved in the worship. The exegetical possibilities of the half-verse ramify through centuries of Jewish, Samaritan and Christian interpretation.²

I. The Septuagint

The earliest translation-cum-interpretation of Gen 4:26 is provided by the Septuagint: “This one (=he) hoped to call upon the name of the L ORD God.” “L ORD God” corresponds to the simple use of the Tetragrammaton in the

² See the excellent study by Steven D. Fraade, Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Postbiblical Interpretation (SBLMS 30; Chico: Scholars Press, 1984).
MT and is of uncertain textual status. This fuller designation may derive from the Septuagintal Vorlage, or may be a translator’s flourish, in either case connecting with the occurrences of the composite form used throughout most of the Eden narrative in Gen 2–3. Wevers claims that the LXX’s use of the composite designation “the Lord God” actually “negates the Hebrew notion that invoking the name YAHWEH began with Enos.” The claim is difficult to justify, and we shall return to it briefly. There are more palpable differences between the Hebrew and the Greek at the beginning of this half-verse, where “This one (= he) hoped” in the Greek corresponds to MT “Then it was begun.” In theory, the Greek could represent an independent, and even the “original,” reading. On the other hand, it seems likely that the two divergences “then”/“this one” and “was begun”/“hoped” are interdependent. If this is granted, two main lines of approach are possible. If הוּא was misread as זה, or if was taken as a rare equivalent of זה, the passive verb would have had to be converted to the active, since “this one was begun” would have conveyed no sense. Conversely, the rendering of בניה by an active verb could have triggered the inclusion of a more explicit subject than would have been indicated within the simple (active) verb-form. Wevers represents the first of these options, concluding that LXX σωτζ is the result of a misreading of הוּא, with dittography a possible factor; with this divergence it became necessary, on Wevers’ view, to render the passive verb of the MT by an active. Others, as we shall see, have simply assumed that the LXX more faithfully reflects the original reading. At the same time, normal Hebrew usage would favour הוא in the kind of situation that the LXX creates, with οὑτος frequently enough translating MT הוא. This seems to raise a question about the status of any presumed Vorlage that hadbaar corresponding to הוּא in the MT.